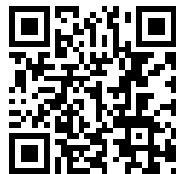
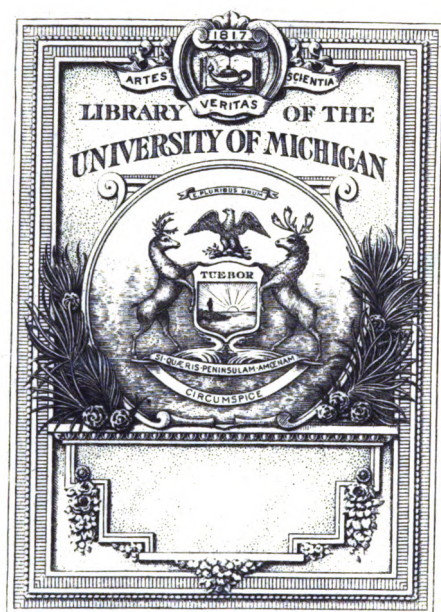

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**THE SPIRIT
OF FRANCE**

Other Works by PAUL COHEN-PORTHEIM

ENGLAND, THE UNKNOWN ISLE

TIME STOOD STILL: My Internment in England 1914-1918

THE DISCOVERY OF EUROPE

In Preparation :

THE MESSAGE OF ASIA

THE SPIRIT OF FRANCE

by

PAUL COHEN-PORTHEIM

Translated by

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This book, as the author's preface shows, was written in the years 1925-26 and published in Germany in the latter year. The author died before arrangements were completed for an English translation, but beyond the addition of a few names I do not think he would have found anything to alter.

PREFACE

FRANCE is today the representative of what may justly be called the purely European genius; to investigate the nature of that genius is the task of this book.

If one would understand France, it is not enough to look at her as she is today and from the kaleidoscope of passing events draw conclusions which will have to be revised in a few months' time. The primary reason why nations misjudge each other is that their judgments are based on superficialities, and not even the superficialities of today but those of yesterday or the day before.

Until 1870, for instance, the French idea of Germany corresponded to the Germany of the Biedermeier and Romantic periods; while to a German, France still means the Paris of Napoleon III, England the England of Queen Victoria. Added to this, the hatred and misunderstanding of the war and post-war periods have so thoroughly distorted the picture that the only thing to do is to begin again from the beginning. Present-day France can only be understood by considering it not in isolation from its history but as its net result so far. It is no longer the France of Jeanne d'Arc or of Louis XIV, but it still carries them in its bosom. A nation is different at every stage of its existence, just like an individual; the Goethe of the second part of *Faust* is not the Goethe of *Werther*, but he is conditioned by him. To no nation does this apply in so high a degree as to France; for none of the great European nations (the only ones with which I am concerned here) has so long, rich and, despite all

P R E F A C E

changes and dissensions, continuous a tradition. She is the most united, self-contained and exclusive of them all. The greater part of this book is devoted to the portrayal of this historical development, of the principal influences emanating from the past, by which the present and the future are determined; then follow some conclusions as to the present significance of France in and for Europe, which would otherwise be left floating in mid-air as mere assertions.

PAUL COHEN-PORTHEIM.

Berlin—Paris, 1925-26.

CHAPTER I

THE LEGACY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

THE French nation, like all the great nations of Europe, is the product of a mixture of races. Who were the country's earliest inhabitants, amazing specimens of whose art have recently been discovered in the caves of Dordogne, remains unknown. At a later period we find Iberians in the south and Celts in the north, while the invasions of the Teutonic tribes and their struggles with the Gallo-Celts start as far back as the third century B.C. The Gauls themselves had meanwhile settled in what are now the northern provinces of Italy, and intermingled with their inhabitants; so that when Cæsar subdued Gaul, what he conquered was not a race, but a mixture of races still in process of fermentation. The history of France begins with the Roman conquest; it is the history of a Latin nation with hardly a drop of Latin blood in its veins.

We know too little about the Gauls, to say nothing of their predecessors, to decide whether and, if so, to what extent they played a part in the formation of the French character. It is sometimes asserted that the intense love of the soil which marks the French peasant is a Gaulish trait, and people talk of the robust cheerfulness of the Gauls; but it is impossible to verify these assertions. The decisive factor was Rome and Latin civilisation; the foundations of the structure that was to become France were Roman, and the spirit of France is even today predominantly Latin. A still barbarous conglomeration of peoples was confronted with a highly developed civilisation,

which it submitted to after a short struggle and then made its own. The French genius received its stamp not from the development of the distinctive traits of the races inhabiting the country, but from the supreme experience of a ready-made civilisation, a tradition already old which it took over. This tradition it has never quite forgotten; unconsciously, and often consciously, it has always gone back to it, clung to it, built on its foundations. The French tradition goes back to the beginnings of Rome, and, since the Rome which conquered Gaul had itself been spiritually conquered by Greece, that means back to Athens.

What was it that the barbarians got from Rome, and what is this Latin element which still persists in the French character ?

Rome brought the knowledge of law and order, the conception of the state and the army; she taught them how to make roads, bridges and aqueducts, built towns, and created regular communications. Commerce and money came in her train, so did her clear and logical language, and art and science too; but over and above all these things, and along with them, came her character and her philosophy—in a word, her spirit.

For the Greeks and Romans, man is the measure of all things, and through them this has become the grand distinguishing mark of the European spirit as such. Therein lie both its greatness and its limitations. Nothing is more alien to the classical spirit than the pantheism of Asia, which sees mankind as part of nature, as one among innumerable manifestations of the all-pervading divinity, not essentially different from others in the shape of animals, plants or stones. For a Greek or Roman, man is the final cause and crown of creation; the rest, known as "nature", is sharply distinguished from man and subordinated to him; where it is recalcitrant it must be

subdued. This nature has no soul; only man was given a soul. Where he does feel nature as a living thing, he invents semi-human creatures to express this feeling—nymphs and dryads, satyrs, fauns and tritons, river- and forest-deities and demi-gods, who are simply human beings with nature-attributes. Without man nature is dead for him. Even his heaven, his Olympus, is peopled by human (often all too human) beings. Why that should be so, we need not enquire here. In the last resort natural environment and climate, which create or modify races, must be held responsible for all these things; the world looks different in bright sunlight and a floating mist, in tropical forests and among the rocks of Attica. In the ancient world the landscape is clear, well proportioned and harmonious; so it is in the greater part of France, and that is why the Latin spirit has been able to maintain itself there.

The classical spirit is of this world; the next is for it a mere phantasm, a negation. Hades is a pale, colourless, shadowy place; this life is everything. It accepts life and is consequently cheerful. The world, which it sees as a completely finite earth, exists for man; there is nothing of value outside man, and nothing terribly important above him—a Cæsar is as good as a God.

It is a strictly limited, wholly unmetaphysical world, with no place in it for vague promptings and undefined regrets, knowing nothing of the world of spirits and phantoms, nothing mystical or occult; not given to meditation nor seeking to penetrate the impenetrable; valuing clearness above depth, and in everything studious of right proportion, the law of which it takes from man.¹ And

¹ I am quite aware that this account of the ancient world is one-sided, that Orphic mysteries, occult teachings, and dark, fatalistic beliefs existed in it. But we are concerned here only with the classical spirit as it was transmitted to succeeding ages, not with those elements in it which fell into oblivion, only to be rediscovered by scholars thousands of years later.

because everything has to be cut to a human pattern, it is, strictly speaking, quite out of touch with nature, which refuses to adapt itself to human standards of measurement. Hence ancient civilisation is essentially urban.

The thought of Indian philosophy at once brings the primæval forest and the jungle, teeming with multitudinous life, before the mind's eye; the *Tao* of the Chinese conjures up visions of infinite solitude; but the symbol of the Græco-Roman world is the town. Acropolis and forum, temples and palaces—its symbols are of stone, raised by human hands in co-operation with the human brain. The primary art of the ancient world is architecture, from which sculpture and painting, its handmaids, branched off. The classical spirit is rationalistic, and so is classical art, in so far as art can be. Greek sculpture is the triumph-song of the human body; even today it constitutes Europe's ideal of beauty, the universally accepted norm to which, after temporary aberrations, it always returns. The study of the human figure is still accepted as the obvious and necessary foundation of everything in the art-schools of Europe today—in contrast to all non-European art—because the Greeks laid it down that it was so.

It is only in the town that the ancient world reaches its highest pitch of development; for a town can be planned, shaped and animated down to the last stone by the human spirit. Everything in it exists through and for man; all measurements, the height of the buildings and the width of the streets, are relative to his. The ancient world carried this human structure to the highest pitch of perfection that it has yet reached; it made of the town a work of art—Athens was an idea translated into form. It is form that the ancient world strives after in everything; it has no feeling for the thing in process of becoming, only for what is already there, perfect in itself. Its outlook is static. It is a midsummer that knows no spring and no

autumn; calm, satisfied, complete, sufficient unto itself; narrowly limited but within those limits perfect. Other civilisations have set themselves greater tasks, but none has so entirely fulfilled the task before it.

The ideal city of the ancients is even more of an intellectual than a physical thing. Here they showed themselves in the highest sense of the word creative; it was they who originated the concepts of citizenship, the state, politics, the commonwealth. Out of a mass of units they created a whole which was a great deal more than the sum of those units—in fact, a community. Even if to start with, in Greece, this was confined to one city, nevertheless we have here the beginning of the great national state. The city is a single organism, with communal interests, joys and sorrows. Its inhabitants are no longer subjects, tools of a ruler; they are themselves the government, either directly (democracy) or through representatives (aristocracy). They are citizens and free men, directing their own destinies and managing their own affairs. They are the first Europeans, under the thumb of no ruler or priestly caste, no children of a severe or benevolent “father”, but independent, grown-up men and women who rely on their own reason. It was in Greece that reason first came into its own, and the development of the human reason is Europe’s real achievement—is, with all its consequence, glorious and otherwise, Europe’s greatest work for mankind. Since that reason was once awakened, no reaction has succeeded in crushing it again for long. After the age of faith, the return of classical lucidity in the Renaissance; after absolutism, the French Revolution. Every revival of reason is at the same time a return to the classical ideal. *The ancient world confined itself to the merely human, but it liberated humanity.*

Rome took over what Athens had created, enlarging its

scale—and coarsening it—enormously. Art, philosophy, political science, the amenities of civilisation—she took them all over from Greece, coarsening and materialising everything, but translating it into practice on a gigantic scale. Her own contributions are seldom of any spiritual value; they consist in the organisation of what she had adopted. In architecture, the Romans are technicians; their great achievements are not temples and palaces but aqueducts and baths. In many respects Rome is the America of Athens. Where she was creative was in the field of law and, above all, in politics.

Mankind owes an incalculable debt of gratitude to Rome for having introduced ancient civilisation into the greater part of Europe. If European man owes his foundations to Athens, it was Rome that made those foundations available to the inhabitants of Europe. But for Rome the very notion of a European would be meaningless. The Romans were a race of war-lords, who conquered half the world and in so doing lost their own internal freedom. The imperialism of the Republic led to the Empire. Rome's greatest man, Julius Cæsar, the creator of Roman Europe, gave the Republic its death-blow; the Romans of Cato's day turned into the Romans of Nero's, the conquerors of Europe into the conquered. As so often in history, human energy and human will, raised to their highest pitch, achieved a result the very opposite of what they intended, but of a magnitude not unworthy of their efforts. Wherever the Roman conquerors settled, hordes turned into nations and barbarians into civilised beings. Roman buildings covered the country; logically planned cities sprang up, vast military highways provided for traffic and commerce. Roman law spread abroad the notion of justice; arts and crafts, philosophy and medicine and, above all, their language were adopted from the Romans. Wherever they penetrated there is even now

a higher morality, a more developed reason, less barbarism, more of Europe, than in regions which remained untouched by their rule. When the barbarians destroyed Rome, Rome destroyed barbarism; defeated in battle, she made a spiritual conquest. The European spirit is and remains rooted in the ancient civilisation which came to it through Rome. That civilisation is the bedrock on which the art and literature, the science and the philosophy of Europe are built, the basis of its military and legal systems, its political and national life; it is the foundation on which the essential nature of the European, his predominating rationalism, his attitude to nature, his urban ideal, rest. The ancient world created the free man, but it cut him off from the life of the universe; it made possible the development of the individual at the expense of the universal. It created a ruling-class morality and tolerated slavery. Just but without compassion, lucid rather than profound, stronger in logic than in imagination, it was perfect within its limitations, but those limitations were its undoing. It is the foundation on which European life is based, but only the foundation; it needed the addition of something new and more universal before Europe could come into existence.

CHAPTER II

LATIN FRANCE

No nation, not even the Italian (owing to many centuries of disruption and consequent foreign domination), has been such a faithful guardian of the Latin tradition as France. Even today, in spite of all later additions and modifications, the spirit of France is still predominantly Latin—so much so that one easily forgets how odd (and contrary to all racial theories) it is that this should be so.

The French language evolved by slow stages out of the disintegration of its parent, Latin, whose lucidity, unambiguousness, clear outline—and lack of fine shades—it shares. It is a perfect vehicle for the thought of its users. The Frenchman thinks logically and clearly, but seldom deeply; everything vague, nebulous, half-baked is alien and unsympathetic to him. In action as in thought, in his works as in his ideals, he stands for measure and order. He is no dreamer, he is not given to over-curious speculations, but neither is he a man of restless activity; he stands for cheerful enjoyment of life, for moderation in both work and pleasure. He cherishes no soaring ideals, but his not superhumanly sublime ones he nearly always achieves. No nation contains more wise people, if contentment be wisdom. But then the French have every reason to be content; for nature has been very kind to them, and here as everywhere it is, in the last analysis, the character of the country that determines the character of its inhabitants. No country in Europe is so rich in natural beauties of every kind as France. It has the southern

magic of Italy on its Mediterranean shores and the green fields of England in Normandy; it has the wide expanses of the ocean, and reaches up to Europe's highest mountain tops; it has the happiest climate in Europe, the best agricultural produce, the best wines. In short, it is in every way the most agreeable country to live in, the country in which one "lives like God Almighty". If the Frenchman travels little, feels no urge to wander, and contents himself with what he has got, here is the obvious explanation. Like his natural surroundings, he is averse from all extremes, and both by talents and inclination equally far removed from the superman and the barbarian. He is content to be a man and accepts life as it is, without metaphysical cravings or Dionysiac intoxication or Faustian despair, like the good Latin that he is.

The Frenchman is a gregarious creature. Nothing is further from him than the desire for solitude or isolation. He is a family man, a social man, and a townsman.

The family is the kernel of the whole body politic. The Latin Frenchman lives primarily in and for his family. This last does not consist merely of his wife and children; it is the regular thing in the provinces, and very common even in Paris, for grandparents, parents and children all to live together, forming a whole tribe, which is generally ruled over by the senior grandfather. Consequently marriage, for a Frenchman, is not primarily a matter of love, but rather of the foundation of a new family, in which reason and economic considerations count for most. That is often the case in other countries too; only there the prosaic facts are covered over with a somewhat factitious cloak of romance, which strikes the Frenchman as unnecessary and dishonest. I do not believe that there are, on that account, more unhappy marriages in France than elsewhere; expectations being less extravagant, disappointments are less frequent—in spite of the novels of adultery and the

plays of the boulevards. These do not prove that adultery is an every-day occurrence in France, but rather that it is looked upon as an interesting and important, i.e. a rare, one. Here as everywhere, of course, adultery on the man's part is judged by quite different standards from adultery on the woman's. The woman is a sinner, whereas people are rather inclined to sympathise with the man. Conversely, a woman whose husband is unfaithful to her is regarded as a martyr; a man whose wife is unfaithful to him, chiefly as a joke. Obviously, a nation which treats marriage and sexual love as perfectly separate things is not going to attach undue importance to sexual irregularities, especially when, like the French, it views everything human, even if it reflects the worst side of human nature, with sympathy and understanding. On the other hand, the Frenchman is merciless towards the man or woman whom passion makes oblivious of obligations to the family. Where love has not been promised it cannot be demanded, but the reciprocal obligations of husband and wife, parents, and children are sacred. This is a point in which the moral principles of the French differ so strikingly from those of other nations that a proper grasp of it is of great importance. It is a fruitful source of misunderstanding, and largely responsible for the false notion of the "immorality" of the French which is especially widespread in Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic countries.

The Frenchman's point of view in questions of sexual morality or ethics is quite different from that of the above-mentioned people; it is Latin, "pagan". For him, sex is one of man's natural functions, and a very proper occupation, at any rate for the young. (I am thinking here of the great mass of the people, not of groups in which social conventions exercise an inhibiting influence). He has no feeling of sin in connection with it and is, in consequence,

guilty of none. He regards sexual affairs not as problems but as gradations and varieties of legitimate amusement—some of them in better taste than others, no doubt. *Tous les goûts sont dans la nature* is a favourite proverb with him, to which he is fond of adding *mais il y en a bien de mauvais*. That is why French juries usually acquit prisoners whose crimes have been prompted by passion, why the French penal code knows nothing of “unnatural vice”, why a prostitute is a *fille de joie* but not a “fallen woman”. In all these matters the Frenchman’s outlook is based on reason, unclouded by any feeling of guilt; he is not immoral, because he does not look at these things from the moral point of view at all; he is simply less inhibited and conscience-ridden than other people.

This is the explanation of another equally misunderstood phenomenon, the position of women in France. In England, and still more in America, the woman is supposed to be a superior being, only to be approached with circumspection by the coarse and clumsy male. She is full of delicate feelings and easily outraged modesty, enigmatic and incomprehensible, and needs to be treated with the greatest respect and care. It is at bottom the mystical woman-worship of the Middle Ages, the chivalric homage of the Troubadours, that is kept up in those countries—officially. In actual fact, however, the woman counts for infinitely less there than in France. Neither the American business man nor the English clubman or sportsman has much time or interest to spare for her. Of the things which he as a private individual or the country really cares about she understands, and is meant by him to understand, nothing. This provokes a reaction in the form of the women’s movement, the desire to be equal with men. They are the countries of masculine women and old maids. In France there is no great enthusiasm among women for “equality” and old maids are very rare.

To the Frenchman women are emphatically not saints, because he disbelieves in human saintliness on principle and looks upon all attempts in that direction with suspicion. Nothing is more alien, more incomprehensible, to him than Puritanism. He knows woman's weakness quite as well as man's, and he knows that this very weakness of hers is the source of her strength. He recognises that a woman wants a man, that a husband and children are the main object of her life, and that she is consequently dependent on him and in no sense a superior being. But he is still more conscious of his own weakness; for no man is so dependent on women as the Frenchman. Byron, the Englishman, could write

Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis a woman's whole existence.

For the Frenchman women are not an occupation for leisure hours but the most important thing in life. Hence their importance, the part they play, is greater in France than in any other country. The North sets the woman on a pedestal and leaves her there in solitary state, the South shuts her up in a slightly milder sort of harem and treats her as a luxury; in France she rules the roost.

She does so in two capacities—as love-object (*maitresse*) and as mistress of the house. The woman whose sexual attraction is strong enough to make a man go to the devil for her is essentially a French ideal, a type that occurs again and again in French literature—e.g. Manon Lescaut, Carmen and the rest.

The Frenchman loves and worships these "hussies", as severe moralists call them, because they are women who exercise dominion as women, through their beauty and their charm. It is the same type, which, under the names of Helen and Cleopatra, dominates the ancient world, and recurs again and again, in ever new forms, in art and life—

the *femme fatale*, the sheer unadulterated female, totally unintellectual but raised to a dæmonic power, one of the great elemental forces of nature.

But in contemplating this ideal figure we must not lose sight of daily life. Frenchwomen are no fatal priestesses of Venus, but, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the most sensible, practical and intelligent housekeepers, wives and mothers—and business women—in the world.

Being extremely intelligent, the Frenchwoman aims at being not merely her husband's housekeeper but also his mistress, not merely efficient but attractive as well. She does not give up trying to please once she is married; she attaches the greatest significance to dress and appearance, and knows how important it is for her to please other men in order to keep her own. Hence her coquetry.

This does not prevent her from being an exceedingly practical and incredibly economical housewife. Economy, that salient characteristic of the French, is often carried by her to the pitch of avarice. She never throws anything away as useless. She is a consummate cook, who can produce the most admirable dishes out of nothing. She is actually too economical to be hygienic. Carpets etc. wear out if they are beaten too often; the sun takes out the colour, so one must be careful about opening windows. Baths are expensive. In the provinces people go to bed very early, because light is dear; and amusements cost money, so they permit themselves very few. The men do not sit in the public houses, either with or without their wives: in a French provincial café you only find very few men after 9 p.m. and they are bachelors. Only on Sundays the whole family, from the great-grandfather to the baby, goes to the café, orders four cups of coffee for the whole party and, on the strength of that, sits for hours reading the papers for the whole week.

The Frenchwoman is a good mother, which is exactly

why she and her husband want no more than two children—a son and a daughter, if possible. In the upper ranks of society the fall in the birth-rate is much the same in all countries; out of indolence and selfishness or weak health people do not want large families. In France, however, the same phenomenon appears in all classes, but from different causes. The peasant does not want his little bit of land to be divided; whereas the *bourgeois*—and France is the country of the small *bourgeois*—wants to make provision for his children. The daughter must have a *dot* if she is to make a suitable marriage, the son has to carry on the business when his father retires. For the ideal is to live economically so that one can retire early and call a little house and garden one's own. In the achievement of this ideal the Frenchman's greatest help is his wife. Among the small shopkeepers, café-proprietors etc. the wife is generally the heart and soul of the business and almost invariably sits at the cash-desk; she is also—I refer to the concierge's wife—the despot and supreme arbiter of the whole race of flat-dwellers.

Women thus play such an important part in French life and their position is such a prominent one that a desire for "equality" would be senseless, when they already enjoy the major rights. On the great stage of their country's history, no less than on the smaller one of family life, women—from Joan of Arc to the mistresses of the Bourbon kings and Napoleon's two consorts—have played the greatest roles.

Like the men of antiquity, the Frenchman is a social creature. He like best to live in a self-contained urban community, not in isolation from his fellows; for he has a strong sense of human solidarity, but not of community with nature.

His house is for him and his family—a self-contained unit; hence his lack of hospitality. But this makes him all

the more sociable out of doors. He loves the street and the market-place and is very ready to strike up an acquaintance with strangers; he likes talking and likes the sound of his own voice. The strong sense of solidarity makes intercourse between different classes of society very easy and natural in France. The Frenchman is so much under the empire of reason, *bon sens*, that it never occurs to him that his neighbour might hold views fundamentally different from his own, might be of another "faith"; and as a matter of fact there can hardly be another country in which a single attitude to life prevails so generally. This attitude is a rationalistic optimism. That life is fun in spite of all its sorrows—of this the Frenchman is sure. Death is an unavoidable evil, to which we should give as little thought as possible; the hereafter may be left to the care of the specialists in that line—i.e. the clergy. Man should enjoy life to the utmost of his powers, as his senses and his instincts dictate, but without forgetting that he is a human being—that is to say, the highest creature in the scale of evolution. It is his duty to keep within bounds, just because those bounds are self-imposed. He owes his neighbour courtesy and consideration and is entitled to demand them in return. Every man has the right to live as he pleases, so long as he does not harm or interfere with his fellows; in practice, however, each individual wants to live in pretty much the same way as his neighbour, because their ideals are the same. It no more occurs to the Frenchman to go and build himself a different sort of house from his neighbour's than it did to the Roman to build one in the "Syrian style", say; what has once been accepted as good is good for everybody. There are, for instance, no two ways of arranging a drawing-room: whatever the house, the symmetrical and architectonic scheme is the same today as it always was. The fireplace is invariably treated in the same way: as a matter of course,

every French mantelpiece has a clock in the middle, candlesticks on either side of it and a mirror at the back. The uniformity in people's furnishing-schemes and (within their class) clothes is matched by a fundamental uniformity of thought and feeling. The tradition is so old and so strong that it has become second nature. That explains the strange contradiction between the great tolerance (itself a product of this classical tradition of rationalism) of the Frenchman on most subjects and his intolerance, so incomprehensible to the foreigner, in others. The French stage is supposed to be the most daring in the world, yet the Paris public indignantly rejected Wedekind's *Frühlingserwachen*, for instance; the subject of childish sexuality falls outside its tradition. All the sexual problems of the Wedekinds and Strindbergs and Shaws inspire it with nothing but dislike and contempt; for they are not its problems. They belong to people endowed with a different sort of conscience—in a word, they are the problems of barbarians. The fact is that at the back of his mind, and often consciously as well, the Frenchman, though he is far too well brought up to tell the foreigner so, shares the conviction of the ancient Roman and divides the world in the same way, into Rome and the barbarians. That is the reverse of his ancient and firmly rooted culture, its great weakness and danger-spot. It is comprehensible enough; for France was through many centuries the defender of the classical, the European heritage, against barbarians and foreigners—in the north, the east and the south, against Vikings and Huns and Arabs—until she achieved independence, and secured and consolidated herself within her own frontiers. That is why the Frenchman even now finds it hard to believe that there are Europeans like himself beyond the borders of France, and actually beyond the Latin countries. The solitary exception he makes is for England: England is, no doubt,

the seat of a civilisation with as good claims as his own, but it is an entirely alien civilisation and of no interest to him.

An old tradition makes nations, no less than individuals, conservative in their outlook. The Frenchman is not fond of novelty; although among the most talented inventors, he generally leaves it to other people to develop and exploit his inventions. It is when a return to his own temporarily forgotten ideals is overdue, when the world has once more become too intolerably unjust, intolerably inhuman, intolerably unreasonable, that he becomes a revolutionary. For the reasons noted above, the Frenchman has little interest in foreign affairs and little understanding of them. His ignorance of other nations makes him a prey to catchwords, which has often proved fatal both to himself and others. At bottom, he knows his "friends" as little as his "enemies", and thus easily becomes a tool in the hands of ambitious or unscrupulous wire-pullers. To home politics, on the other hand, he brings a lively interest and understanding which make it very difficult to fool him there. He is very far indeed from having any excessive respect for the men who govern him, and regards neither the President nor the ministers nor parliament in any way as supermen. In the whole of French history one looks in vain for that almost mystical reverence which other nations feel for their rulers and statesmen or commanders. The single exception here is Napoleon.

The Frenchman is also thoroughly classical in his admiration for the art of rhetoric. A great orator moves him as an artist even when he does not share his views. Here, as everywhere, it is form that he values; for nothing without form is real to him. There is nothing superficial about this; it is deeply rooted in his whole philosophy of life. Even if, as a result, he is sometimes bamboozled by mere phrases, he is, nevertheless, a man of the highest

intellectual integrity. His intellect works with the most relentless logic, up to the limits that he has himself set to it, and even his language tolerates no half measures. He follows out every idea to its logical conclusion with ruthless consistency. With all his *bon sens* he is a born theorist. Blind to the fact that life cannot be imprisoned in articles, he works out the most precise laws and is unpleasantly surprised when the facts of life refuse to conform either to his code or to his constitution. In this respect he is the exact opposite of the Englishman. He finds it very hard to compromise in intellectual or spiritual matters: thus, when he is going through an anti-religious phase, he just gets rid of God altogether; when he finds the king and the aristocracy guilty, he puts them to death. That, too, is a Roman trait. He sets more store by the idea of justice than by that of mercy: the men who championed Dreyfus, or Voltaire when he defended Calas, did so not out of sympathy with the accused or pity for their fate but because they believed them to have been unjustly condemned.

This intellectual honesty and integrity of the French comes out in their art and literature also, in two ways. In the first place, their work is honest—that is to say, it does not try to appear more than it really is, form and content correspond; and further, the life of the artist or writer accords with the message contained in his works. Thus writers like Voltaire, Zola and Anatole France, who challenged the reactionary forces of their day in their books, felt themselves bound, on purely conscientious grounds, to descend into the arena of politics when those forces threatened to take their toll of victims. They are honest workers because they modestly regard themselves primarily as craftsmen and learn their job, their *métier*, properly. The writer is master of the language, the painter, the sculptor, the actor of the technique of their respective arts: the playwright does not call himself an

artist—for that already implies a degree of praise to which only few can lay just claim—but an *auteur dramatique*. No doubt genius can pooh-pooh these rules, but geniuses are rare everywhere, and if the general level in France is so consistently high, that is the result of sound and thorough training.

“We all have the qualities of our defects”, runs the French proverb, and the reverse is no less true. Great honesty often goes with a certain prosaic quality: there is a kinship between untruthfulness and imagination, but not between rationalism and poetry. French art is weak in music and lyrical poetry, strong in architecture and the portrayal of human beings. The more rational the branch of art, the more successfully does the Frenchman practice it; the more feeling ought to predominate in it, the less congenial it is to him.¹

When he wants to display feeling and imagination, he easily falls—for the outsider, at least—into rant and rhetoric. That is why French classical tragedy, for example, remains remote and unconvincing to other nations, whereas Molière’s comedies speak a universal language. The perfect construction of the tragedies (the architectonic quality again) may excite one’s admiration, but their finely proportioned art lacks the something more that belongs to the tragic character and alone stamps it as such; their personages never burst their bonds, they remain shackled—with the possible exception of Racine’s *Phèdre*.

This makes the French all the greater where clearness of vision and knowledge of human nature are required—in the novel, in comedy and its cousin, satire. Their writers have exercised an immense influence through holding vice, depravity or abuses up to ridicule, e.g.

¹ In this chapter, which is dedicated to Latin France, I have deliberately passed over much that, both in appearance and in reality, contradicts what is said here, in order to exhibit these foundations of the French spirit clearly at the outset.

Molière, Voltaire, Beaumarchais. *En France c'est le ridicule qui tue.*

The Latin Frenchman has developed as he has done because he is a townsman, and, being what he is, he finds his most perfect expression in his own capital. In this sense Paris is France. Paris is the most beautiful of the great capitals, and the only one that gives the impression of a deliberately executed work of art. Like all other great cities it has grown up, but its growth has always remained under control all the time. One never feels in Paris that one is in a sea of houses, a desert of stone; the impression of a plan, clearly conceived and consciously followed, never leaves one. Nor is this plan an unimaginative or purely utilitarian one: it allows plenty of scope for individuality, and no city has more different sorts of streets and squares than Paris. The proudest of triumphal avenues and the narrowest of little alleys, impressive *places* and quiet nooks, are equally to be found in it. Every age, from the Romans to the Frenchmen of the twentieth century, has contributed to its embellishment, and through all the vicissitudes of time and style, its spirit has always remained the same, so that the net result is no patchwork but a coherent whole. Paris is the symbol of the French race, the centre round which France, as we know it, has crystallised through the centuries. Very gradually, it has penetrated and shaped the whole country: were the Frenchman given to mysticism, Paris would be his holy city; as he is not in the smallest degree, it is merely the goal of his desires. To be a Parisian, to live in Paris, is the Frenchman's highest bliss; all else is but a shadow of life, a provincial existence. Everything depends on Paris, even when its attitude is positively hostile to him. It is no book or piece of country, no sea or mountain-range or forest, no one building or work of art

even, that symbolises this nation; its symbol is its capital, the memorial that it has built with its own hands.

Securely self-enclosed stands this monument of Latin France, raised in the course of centuries. It is unmetaphysical, conceived not as a tower of Babel but as the most perfect possible dwelling-place for the most perfect possible people. Reason has built and reason sustains it, teaches it proportion, harmony, clarity and reasonableness—these are the qualities which mark the language, as they do the thoughts, of France. The French spirit is clear, cheerful and free from extremes, like the French climate. And it shows itself the same in every sphere: plays and gardens are constructed on the same scheme, rooms are symmetrical just as temples are; the family and the constitution, the bouquet and the town, all are built up on one and the same plan.

Everything is self-contained, perfect in itself—form completely realised and, like all form, limited; each separate object, each cell, co-ordinated with the rest and given its due rank. The whole of Latin France resembles a vast, symmetrical and carefully arranged flower-bed, where every plant is in its proper place, arranged according to height, colour and species; the whole forming a brilliant, many-coloured star, outlined with geometric precision, where everything is relative to something else and depends on something else, and everything looks towards the centre, the kernel which gives the whole its meaning.

CHAPTER III

GOTHIC FRANCE

THE history of the European nations begins at the moment of their conquest by Rome or by Christianity. Those who escaped the Roman influence remained "barbarians" till Christianity penetrated to them. It must never be forgotten that the victoriously advancing Church was the heir of the Roman Empire, and that it was the mixture of Judæo-Christian ethics and Roman imperialism that produced Catholicism. The Church was the channel by which Latin culture reached the barbarians, hence her task was easier where Rome had preceded her; hence also Catholicism still keeps its hold in those countries. At the same time Catholicism has retained more of a "classical" character in the Latin countries than elsewhere; that is to say, the Roman element in Catholicism is more in evidence than the Christian. That is why in those countries, especially in Italy, it has always remained steeped in the old, pagan spirit and has not set itself up in opposition to the primitive instincts of the people. The typically Christian, as opposed to pagan, side of it, the world of art and thought to which the ancient civilisation was something alien and abhorrent, needed the Germanic influence before it could develop.

The Gauls embraced Christianity at a very early stage, quite soon after the Roman conquest; its triumph there was immediate and effortless. But it was the Frankish conquest and the conversion of the conquerors to Christianity that really created the French nation. The two races, instead of remaining victors and vanquished, united on the common

basis of the new faith to form a single whole, and the result was France. This France, the eldest daughter of the Church, was essentially a Christian polity; the unifying principle of the new kingdom which grew out of the Latin soil being not a race or language but the common faith. Held together by this bond, the Latin genius of the natives and the very different genius of the conquerors succeeded in producing a synthesis which embraced both and out of them created something new.

In course of time the spirit of mediæval Christendom triumphed all over Europe and created a single European civilisation; but the first exponents of that civilisation were the Franks. Their greatest ruler, Charlemagne, is the pre-eminent figure of the Middle Ages. The whole of European history is dominated by the problem of how to fuse into a whole the various elements that have gone to the making of European civilisation, how to form a European spirit out of the classical, the Christian and the Teutonic; and never was the attempt so nearly successful as under Charlemagne, the heir of the Roman Empire, who received his crown from the Pope in Rome, and whose dominions included present-day France and the most important parts of Germany and Italy. Europe had a real centre in the Rhineland and the new capital of Aix, thus realising an ideal which it is still far from attaining even today. But only for a short time, unfortunately. Under Charlemagne's feeble successor came the division of his realm into three parts, from which we are still suffering. The middle portion, Lorraine (which included present-day Belgium, Luxembourg, the Rhineland and Alsace-Lorraine), became an everlasting apple of discord between the other two; and the claim to be the heir of the Roman Emperors, the overlord of Europe, seems to be bound up in an almost mystical fashion with the possession of this Rhineland, to which the Imperial crown remained attached

after the partition. During the succeeding centuries it was the misfortune of Germany that her conquests in the Mediterranean made her Rome's heir ; distracted by endless struggles over this legacy, she could never attain inner unity, never establish a great German state. France, relieved of this overwhelming burden, was able to devote herself to building up her own state and her own culture.

What Europe missed France achieved—namely, a synthesis of the classical, the Christian and the Teutonic. This is what enabled her, at a later period, to be the leader of Europe for centuries; she was the first European nation.

In the Middle Ages it looked as if the legacy of Rome had perished utterly even in France ; a contemporary historian could not have regarded the ancient world as anything but dead and done-for. Conversely, if the Gothic, mediæval spirit seems to have faded out entirely in the France of today, one should guard against falling into the same error. A nation which has absorbed various cultures and digested them, often manages in the most surprising way, when the needs of the moment demand it, to revive old memories which have been so long in cold storage that they have become unfamiliar even to it, and to draw from them what looks like new strength. In spite of the great break of the Revolution, the Gothic spirit is still alive in France.

It must strike the superficial judge as almost preposterous (and precisely for that reason ought to give him pause) that the crown and symbol of the Christian Middle Ages, Gothic architecture, should have taken its rise in France and just in its most French part—the immediate neighbourhood of Paris. These illusions are the inevitable result of the senseless and absurd habit of treating “Teutonic” and “German”, “Latin” and “French” as identical terms.

Gothic is of French, not German, origin—if we must

apply these terms, which mean something today, to a period in which they as yet meant nothing. It is really the result of the re-modelling of the Latin character under Teutonic influence, of the fusion of races which took place under the unifying influence of Christianity in the country which later became France. By making a success of this synthesis the West Frankish kingdom became the leader of Europe and the creator of the new spirit which was to dominate it for centuries.

The utterly un-Latin feudal system was no less firmly entrenched in France than in the rest of Europe. The ideal of the free citizen, of the sovereign city-state, of unclouded sensuous enjoyment, had gone under, and its place had been taken by the feudal lord and his vassals, by the whole intricate structure of subordination and responsibility, the pyramid with serfdom for its base and the king at its apex. The ideal of liberty disappeared, yielding place to that of loyalty. Grim castles commanded the countryside, the towns cowered behind walls, churches looked like fortresses. Only in the monasteries and among the priests did any traces of the art and science of former times, of the Latin language and classical scholarship, survive. It was a grim, hard, comfortless age in which men's eyes were forcibly turned towards the next world. From this gloomy soil, this atmosphere of a dying world (in many respects akin to the present day), sprang the miracle of Gothic.

The use of a single term, the "Middle Ages", to cover two such different epochs in the life of Europe as those which are known in relation to art as the Romanesque and the Gothic, amounts to a positive falsification of history. It would be much more correct to speak of a Gothic Renaissance following on the Middle Ages ; for it was a time of re-birth for humanity.

This Renaissance arose from the concentration of all living forces on one objective, and the concentration was

due, as usual in history, to the menace of a common enemy, in this case Islam. A large portion of the Græco-Roman world had been conquered by the Arabs : Asia Minor, North Africa, Sicily and Spain had gone over to the new faith, and an alien, highly developed civilisation was springing up there ; France and Italy were threatened, and in the East the Byzantine Empire was tottering to its fall. It seemed in every way probable that Islam would conquer the whole of Europe. But the Holy Sepulchre, then in the hands of the infidels, became for Christian Europe a symbol of the danger that threatened it ; its reconquest was resolved upon at the Council of Clermont in France, and the Crusades, with this end in view, united the chivalry of the whole of Christendom.

They failed to achieve their object, of course, but in other ways their effect was immense ; for they created a united Europe once more (and it is noteworthy that each such attempt at European unity embraces a larger portion of Europe than its predecessors), they prevented this united Europe from being overwhelmed by Islam, and brought back from their contact with its hostile civilisation new knowledge with the aid of which they reconstructed Europe. Contact with the East enlarged Europe's horizon enormously and gave wings to its imagination. A world had perished, but a brighter, more beautiful one was coming into being

Gothic architecture has been regarded too exclusively as the expression of a mystical, almost desperate striving after holiness and the infinite, as a struggle for salvation. To me it seems a cheerful art, especially as compared with its predecessor, and in its best period ; bursting the prison of its walls, letting in the many-coloured light through vast windows, shooting up towards the sun like a great tree, yet never losing control and bursting into excess—only in its decadence did it do that. The Gothic cathedrals are miracles

of elaborate mathematical calculation, akin to the subtleties of the Schoolmen in spirit. Looked at from another point of view, they are a symptom of the rediscovery of this world and all its beauty, of flowers and plants, beasts and men; they are an expression in stone of the passion for nature. And, paradoxical as it may sound, they are classical in spirit. Notre Dame has much more in common with the ancient world than with a gloomy romanesque cathedral : perfectly proportioned and harmonious, complete in itself, it has the serene dignity of a Greek temple. And the later sculptures at Rheims have given rise to the conjecture that the artists must have been acquainted with Greek originals. The Gothic and the classical are as closely related in spirit as they are outwardly opposed to each other in the language of their forms. The place to look for the antithesis of the classical spirit is not a Gothic cathedral but a mediæval robber-baron's castle.

One can see from French Gothic that the Middle Ages did not entirely destroy the classical spirit, that it lived on, transformed and intensified, not annihilated. It is here that the dual character of the French nation, which is the reason why it is so difficult to understand and why its history is so full of surprises, first comes out. The French are at one and the same time the most conservative nation in Europe and the nation in which the most important innovations and the most revolutionary changes originate. Their sensitiveness to new ideas comes from their richly mixed bloods which lays them open to the most various influences. Their natural affinities are of the most different kinds : they are related to the present-day English through the Normans and, through the strong Teutonic strain in them, to the Germans ; the Celtic Bretons link them with Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and there are Greek, Latin and Arab elements in the south. It is only with the Slavs—and that is highly significant for the situation today—that

they have absolutely no kinship. As a result of these affinities, the most various ideas, tendencies and points of view can find an echo in France without being felt as alien, because they awaken unconscious memories of one past or another. France is Europe in miniature. Only on these lines is there any hope of understanding how France can be the country of the Crusades one day and of the Revolution and, later, Napoleon the next.

But it is none the less the most conservative of countries, because the Græco-Roman mould in which it was originally cast was so rigid and has become so much a part of its being, that it sooner or later impresses itself on everything and re-shapes it in its own image, being strong enough to take in and digest any amount of new material without losing its own identity.

There is thus a continuity of tradition in France which is never quite lost. The feudal system, absolute monarchy, imperialism lead back to the ancient republican ideal of equality in the end, and Gothic, Baroque and Romanticism issue in a return to the antique. Within the framework of French civilisation these tendencies are at war with one another, but the moment one compares them with their counterparts in other countries, they all appear classical, harmonious, regular and well-proportioned.

This is true even of Gothic. For the most perfect (that is, the most "classical") examples of Gothic, one must go to France—the stained glass of Chartres, the sculptures of Rheims, the nave at Amiens, the harmony of Notre Dame are unequalled ; but for the most "Gothic" examples, elsewhere—to Germany or Spain. There the Gothic spirit plunges into those excesses which the Frenchman, heir of the ancient world, finds strange, sinister and barbaric. Towers, which are generally squared off in France, shoot up sharp-pointed into infinity ; columns, turrets, battlements, carvings luxuriate like tropical forests.

When the people of Seville decided to build their cathedral (incidentally, a great deal of Spanish work was done under German architects), they wanted to build "something so vast that posterity should say that madmen had planned it". Nothing could be further from the French mind than such a resolve. The spirit of French Christianity is the same spirit that finds outward expression in the French cathedrals. It remained, within the prescribed Catholic framework, serene and cheerful ; there is nothing of the passionate enthusiasm of the early Christians about it, nothing of the dark fanaticism of Spain, nothing of the cold Puritanism of the North. The Church did not remain heathen as in Italy ; it is Christian, but Christian in a French way. The great princes of the Church in France are worldly figures, great diplomats and statesmen who preside over their country's destinies. There are no Loyolas among them, no St. Theresa of Avila, no St. Francis or St. Catharine of Siena—France's great Catholic names are Richelieu and Mazarin. And the great object of its veneration is Our Lady, woman and mother, the least divine and most human figure of the Christian mythology.

The patron saints of France are in perfect harmony with this spirit—not passionate mystics or theologians or benefactors of mankind, but men and women of action, people whose religion expressed itself in active political life, champions of the faith but, above all things, champions of France. Her great Christian symbolic figures are St. Louis and Joan of Arc.

St. Louis is the knight *sans peur et sans reproche*, the hero of the Crusades and defender of the faith ; but he is also the French king who staunchly resisted the exaggerated claims of Rome and tolerated no interference with civil justice ; the man who gave judgment under the oak and defended the cause of the poor, and, incidentally,

the founder of the Second Chamber, out of which the Parliament subsequently grew. A pious Christian but no fanatic, he is great, not in virtue of the superhuman development of one single quality, but—and here he is typically French—by the happy combination of well-adjusted aims and talents. In a word, he is a classic type.

But it is a woman who has remained, even down to the present day, and for non-Catholics, the symbol of France—Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans. It is only quite recently that the Church decided to canonise her. Everybody knows, of course, that she was burnt as a heretic at the instance of the priests, but from her very first appearance the common people regarded her as an emissary of Heaven. Her humble origin and, for all her belief in signs and wonders, sound common sense endeared her to their hearts. She freed her country from the domination of the foreigner, and was shamefully done to death, a victim of political intrigue. Her character, life and achievement were such as the common people could understand ; a lady of high degree or an unpractical dreamer could never have roused their enthusiasm in the same way. Joan of Arc is the patron saint of an unmystical people and the symbol of a nation that works out its own salvation.

Because the change which came over the French genius and expressed itself in Gothic did not completely transform that spirit, it must not therefore be under-estimated. Without it France, instead of becoming France, would have remained an echo of the ancient world and could never have exercised a decisive influence over the rest of Europe. In order to appreciate the whole significance of this spirit of Gothic art, one must consider how widely its influence radiated from its original home in France. The Christian Gothic ideal which was first developed there imposed itself out to the furthest extremities of Europe. For long years

it welded France, Germany, England and Spain (in which it remained a living force long after it had died out in its original home) together into a unity which extended far beyond the short-lived unification achieved by Charlemagne, a voluntary unity whose basis was not material but spiritual.

That was only possible because the French genius had acquired what it had previously lacked. Rationalism had been supplemented by a turn for metaphysics, and the fermenting, dynamic element, the thing that is striving to come into existence, had combined with the static, the thing whose form is already fixed, which would have become petrified without it. Nothing but the union of these two elements could produce a culture acceptable to the whole of Europe ; for too much of it had remained untouched by ancient civilisation and was separated from it by a great gulf.

The extent and duration of the supremacy of the Gothic ideal among the different nations depended entirely on how deeply the ancient civilisation had taken root. In Italy Gothic remained entirely on the surface, while in Spain it combined not so much with Græco-Roman as with Moorish elements ; its influence was strongest and most permanent in the Teutonic countries. In England the Gothic style has never quite died out, and the Gothic ideals of love, chivalry and vassaldom, and religion are even now a living force. A Gothic palace is as much the natural meeting-place for Parliament there as a classical temple is in France. In spite of the short-lived Roman occupation, ancient civilisation has had little influence on the mental development of the English, the reason being that later foreign invaders, especially the Normans, did not, as in France, coalesce with the native inhabitants but kept them down. It is, however, on the Germans that Gothic had its most lasting effect. It was, and has remained, Germany's

great experience. Germany having remained practically untouched by ancient civilisation, the Gothic spirit had no resistance to overcome there. Hence it was able to develop to its fullest extent, but hence also the synthesis which France achieved was denied to Germany. That is the explanation of the German's perpetual yearning for the South and its classical spirit, which runs right through his history and literature without (apart from short-lived, isolated exceptions) attaining its end. But when a German wants to go back to a genuine German tradition, he turns to the Christian Middle Ages, the era of Gothic. The much-canvassed antithesis between the German and French characters is nothing more or less than the difference between the predominantly Gothic ideal of one and the (in spite of an intermixture of Gothic) predominantly classical ideal of the other. It looks as if the psycho-analytical doctrine, that first impressions by their overwhelming strength permanently determine the whole character, whereas subsequent experiences only touch the surface, were true of nations no less than of individuals. France's first waking impression was the ancient, Germany's the Gothic world, and Gothic could no more completely remould the French genius than the Renaissance and classicism could the German.

The great influence of Gothic on the German countries must not, however, mislead us into concluding that it is itself purely Germanic. It is not merely that it could never have come into existence without the ancient civilisation, and that the liberation of the European spirit only became possible after contact with the East ; there was yet another extremely important motive power behind it that has hardly been investigated at all as yet, namely, the Celtic influence. That aboriginal people which was pushed back into the furthest corner of France, Brittany, and their cousins in Cornwall and Wales whom a like fate befell, in

the Middle Ages regained spiritual, if not political, influence. The Celtic countries are the home of saga and poetry; from them a strong, wholly unrationalistic, unclassical, mystical, metaphysical, "occult" strain made its way first of all into France and then all over Germanic Europe. Mysticism, superstition, and a talent for music and poetry are even now the marks of the modern descendants of the Celts, and in so far as such a strain makes itself felt in the character of the French, it is tolerably safe to attribute it to the Celtic element in their composition.

Reverie and passion, ecstasy and despair, the mystical worship of nature, the belief in witchcraft and sorcery, tempests and clouds and magic words, melancholy and triumphant love—all the impulses of a still primitive but infinitely profound emotional nature find their voice in the sagas of this race. Spread abroad by wandering minstrels in the Middle Ages, these sagas became the first "romances" and subsequently, under Christian influences, produced new, mystical Christian legends, from which both religious mysticism and the ideals of chivalry sprang.

Most of these sagas revolve round the legendary figure of King Arthur—the great drama of Tristan and Isolde, perhaps the finest of all love stories, Merlin the Sorcerer and Lancelot the Knight; and, as later editions, the legend of the Holy Grail and Parsifal.

A new world was opening out, infinitely remote from the ancient world, but also miles away from the gloomy castles of the Middle Ages. The Celtic achievement undoubtedly played a great part in the growth of that spirit of which Gothic was the mature fruit—certainly a far greater one than the rather superficial and frivolous world of the Troubadours of the south. In this sense too, the Gothic ideal comes from France, from one of the little known, half forgotten ingredients in that great medley which we call the French genius. Because of its mixed origin that

genius has constantly expressed itself in the most surprising and unexpected ways, and may yet do so again.

It is an odd thing that this "mysticism from the Atlantic", these figures of Frankish-Celtic legend, left far less permanent traces behind them in France than in Germany. To a German, Tristan and Parsifal are essentially his own countrymen, figures out of his own past; but they are more remote than Hercules or Icarus to a Frenchman. Such is the strength of first impressions—and such the weakness of the tie of race.

In a word, then, the Gothic spirit, which is of French growth, introduced into the French character new elements without which that character could never have developed into what it did. This Gothic spirit combined, in France, with the classical spirit to produce a synthesis which may rightly be called the European spirit, because in it all the most important factors in the European genius, the classical, the Christian, the Teutonic and, as we have seen, the Celtic, first formed a single whole. This new thing had an even greater effect on other countries than on France; Gothic is France's first great contribution to Europe. There are times in the lives of nations when their activities are self-regarding and other times when they are (not necessarily consciously) primarily for the benefit of others. Classical France laboured for itself, Gothic France for Europe.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAND SIÈCLE

For an understanding of the essential character of France, it is the classical element that matters most; but when it comes to assessing the part played by her in the affairs of Europe, it is the Gothic.

As the mother of Gothic, France was the acknowledged leader of Europe, but with the Renaissance this position passed to Italy. The Renaissance came to France, as to other countries, at second-hand : hence this period in French history is only important to France herself. There it involved nothing like so complete a swing-round, so abrupt a break, as it did elsewhere ; for it was more of a reawakening than a completely new departure. The wars which sent French armies on long and frequent expeditions to Italy, had transplanted the revived ancient civilisation to France, where it found no difficulty in acclimatising itself. The great upheavals of the period did not, of course, leave France unaffected. Two new great Powers arose—Spain, through the unification of the country and the discovery of America, and the Habsburgs (who were to be France's age-long rivals in the struggle for supremacy), through the Burgundian marriage. France thus lost her pre-eminent position. The Reformation led to bitter struggles there too, but they did not end in hopeless dismemberment as they did in Germany. As early as Henri IV's time the *bon sens* of the nation triumphed, if not quite finally. He himself became a Catholic (*Paris vaut bien une messe*), and the Edict of Nantes gave the Protestants complete equality of

rights and freedom of conscience. And then the Thirty Years' War, in which France took part, ended fortunately for her. In spite of all untoward events the Renaissance period was one of consolidation and internal growth, in which the monarchy gradually got the whole country under its control (one must remember that in the early days the "vassals" were often more powerful and ruled over far larger territories than their king). All real power became concentrated more and more in the hands of the monarch; the machinery of government and intellectual life both became more and more centralised in his capital. French finally emerged as the language of the whole country: the language of the south, the *langue d'oc*, disappeared, and Latin was relegated to the Church; France became French. The age of European unity was over, the age of the great dynastic feuds, royal house against royal house, had begun. France became an absolute monarchy: it was in this new form that she revealed herself to the world in the *grand siècle*, with a culture that was no longer European like the Gothic and no longer a chip of the mighty Græco-Roman block, but purely French—a culture bound up with the court and absolutism, that was new in this form and harmonised with the spirit of the times. This culture was imitated all over the world and restored France to the leadership of Europe for many years to come.

There is an apparent contradiction in the way this typically French culture extended its influence far beyond the borders of France. Nevertheless, it is not to be compared in this respect with the Gothic. Gothic was taken over by the people in other countries, who re-moulded it and regarded it not as a foreign body but as a creation of their own; whereas the *grand siècle* and its culture were and remained aristocratic. The court and nobility in other countries formed themselves on the French model; the language, art, taste and spirit of France became obligatory

for "society" everywhere. The "great world" became French and remained so right into the nineteenth century; but the learned world and the middle and lower classes remained entirely unaffected. An "international" of courtiers arose, completely shut off from other classes, and French in its manners and habits of thought. The *grand siècle* perfected the absolutist, aristocratic ideal and secured its triumph everywhere, French influence penetrating, for the first time in history, even to Russia. The only countries to remain unaffected were Holland and England, where a Protestant, bourgeois culture was growing up almost unnoticed by foreign contemporaries.

In every other country, however, the preponderance of the monarchy and the court was so great that they stamped their period and country with their own—that is to say, a French—character. It is, therefore, all the more remarkable that nearly all these monarchs were political opponents of Louis XIV and at war with him at some time or other—a proof how far the world still stood from the concept of the nation as we now understand it, what a different (and far less narrow-minded) thing the "patriotism" of this period was. War and politics had nothing whatever to do with questions of culture: even for Frederick the Great, French culture was not merely the highest but the only culture that existed, though that did not for a moment prevent his making war on France. In the world war it was all but high treason to admit that the enemy were civilised beings at all.

Every ruler in Europe, down to the pettiest princeling, blindly followed the great example set by Louis XIV and the ideal of splendour he created around him. French art was an article of faith for all Europe, and the spirit of French civilisation, strictly limited but within its limits great, reigned supreme over the whole continent—no longer creative, quickening the slumbering seed in each country to life, its own life, but imported, imitated, foreign

in its essence, and only available to the great. The spirit of the *grand siècle* dominated the rulers of other countries, but these rulers and their courts had become strangers to their own peoples.

What is the nature of this spirit ? It has created its own memorial, its everlasting symbol, in Versailles. Versailles is, in form and spirit, a symbol on the same level as the Pyramids, the Parthenon and the Forum. The French genius, to which architecture is of all the arts the most congenial, here had the chance to show its powers to the utmost in a work of gigantic scale, to express the inner meaning of its culture in the language of stone. Every civilisation is the materialisation of an ideal, every building that means something and stands for something is the temple of a deity; this particular temple is a palace, because its deity is the king—the *Roi Soleil*. We are almost back to the deification of the Cæsars, and even the worship of the god of light, here. The king is God's anointed, his vice-gerent in France, the source of all grace, of all honours; he is the state, since there is nothing that does not depend on him; not merely its centre and its head but its whole content, since it is only in relation to him that other things acquire a meaning. This is a religion so alien and uncongenial to us that it is almost an effort to admit what a magnificent thing it was and how great, for all his faults and weaknesses, must have been the man who, not in distant barbarous lands and ages but a few centuries ago, imposed it on his own nation and on the rulers of other nations, and was admired and loved, almost worshipped, in return; until the yoke pressed too heavily and too long—he reigned for 72 years—and the people realised that exhaustion, hunger and ruin were the price they had to pay for the glory of their divinity. The death of the king was greeted with general rejoicing and was a great relief even to the court. Versailles is his symbol, the symbol of absolute, God-like monarchy. The

building of it, personally directed by the king, took twenty years and cost 70,000,000 francs ; the cost in human life was even more terrific, as the site was marshy and fever-ridden. Unquestionably, it is one of the greatest architectural feats of all times.

If it seems today that the game was hardly worth the candle, if Versailles is no longer regarded as one of the artistic wonders of the world, one ought nevertheless to think twice before committing oneself to this judgment. Our own age, which has so far proved itself incapable of producing a style, prides itself on having a wider grasp of the art of all ages and peoples than has ever been attained before and believes that it can weigh the merits of all art quite impartially. The latter is, of course, an illusion; for every age has its prejudices : our own, for instance, can once more fully appreciate Gothic, but the formal magnificence of Louis XIV leaves it cold. To put Versailles on a level with, say, Rheims Cathedral today would raise a protest from every authority on art ; barely a century ago the protests would have been even louder, but in the reverse direction. Versailles is perfect in its own way, it is the mighty embodiment of an ideal which no longer appeals to us.

It is the supreme masterpiece of perspective, symmetry and geometry, where every detail has been strictly planned and nothing left to chance anywhere; utterly unpicturesque, unimaginative, unromantic, and, in spite of the most lavish ornamentation and decoration, prosaic and rationalistic in spirit. As the cathedral in its shape and arrangement symbolises Christ, so does Versailles symbolise the king. All its lines converge on a single point and the whole vast pile is conceived from a single centre—the royal bed-chamber. (The fact that it is the bed-chamber and not, for instance, the throne-room is characteristic of the age and its outlook ; Napoleon would have made it the

throne !) In the middle of this chamber stands the bed of state surmounted by the rising sun, with the king in it; his rising or *levée* a veritable sunrise, to be present at which constitutes the courtier's highest bliss. The decoration of the palace, the paintings and sculptures, the carvings on the walls and the furniture are all there to glorify the king. From the paintings on the ceilings to the handle of a door, he managed to impose his personal taste on the style of the period in every detail. That taste is formal, showy, rich but not overloaded, never losing sight of the great line in a mass of detail; everything regulated, everything in order, everything subjected to a tremendous etiquette; neither cheerful nor gloomy, but cool and dignified; the whole forming a magnificent setting, but only a setting for the king and his court, for revels and receptions. No building in the world gives one such an uncanny feeling of deadness as Versailles today.

Magnificent as the palace itself is, it is only a part—the central part—of the plan of Versailles, which extends far beyond it. The town, whose main streets all lead to the *place* in front of the palace (and head straight for the royal bed-chamber), is an integral part of that plan; its function is that of a prelude or anacrusis; while the vast adjacent park with its dead-straight walks, fountains and canals is merely a continuation of the palace. The subjection of nature, no less than the works of man, to the rules of art; the subjection of nature, as a work of man's hands, to the will of the king; town, palace and nature as the single expression of his personality:—that is the mighty idea behind Versailles.

The trees assume the geometrical shapes prescribed for them; the waters splash when and how they are commanded; and as far as the eye can reach, it sees nothing expressive of any idea but that of the royal will. Never before had the bold attempt been made to turn a whole

piece of country into a monument, and never has it been repeated on such a scale and with such singleness of purpose. Every ruler in Europe tried to imitate Versailles; every country—with the characteristic exception of England—has its palaces and gardens in the style of Louis XIV; and perhaps it is this craze for imitation that is responsible for our losing sight of the greatness and significance of the original. What is justifiable as the symbol of the greatest monarch of his age becomes grotesque when it is applied to the glorification of some twopenny-halfpenny princeling, and this deification of the “Serenissimus” may mislead one into seeing a “Serenissimus” in Louis XIV. Nothing could be more mistaken. True, he wore a wig, but it was not the wig, it was the king underneath it that created the new epoch; whereupon the rest of them proceeded to imitate the wig.

Versailles is his personal creation, but the whole intellectual life of France was influenced by him. The spirit which speaks from Versailles set its seal upon everything that the age produced. This does not mean that Versailles was a second Byzantium, where everything was subordinated to the exaltation of the monarch—that was not at all the case; it means that the spirit which animated the king in the creation of Versailles is the same spirit as animated the artists and writers and statesmen in the creation of their works. Strict rules and principles of design, composition and centralisation established themselves in every sphere. Every work of art, even if it was in no way concerned with the royal person or its glory, resembled the symbol of royalty in its formal dignity, its strict symmetry and harmony, and its subjection to a will, an idea, to which everything secondary was ruthlessly sacrificed. The greatness of the king lies in the fact that he recognised this.

Perhaps it would be just as true to say that the spirit of

the age was such as I have described and that the king represented rather than created it. It is probably a mistake to look for cause and effect here at all : both king and art were products, and became symbols, of the *Zeitgeist*, which we may label "the classical tradition in a definitely French shape".

It is remarkable how little this style, which is called Baroque, has to do with what passes under the same name in other countries (only, of course, in so far as these countries were not imitating France). The original Baroque, which is Italian Baroque, is the embodiment of the counter-reformation—ponderous, forcible, dynamic, struggling, aspiring, fond of high relief ; it is the product of an anti-renaissance spirit. French Baroque, on the other hand, is entirely worldly, even in its churches; it is not a counterblast to the Renaissance but merely a new version of it. The Baroque of other countries is "romantic", that of France "classical", its forms strictly defined.

The *grand siècle* is the age of classical French literature and art, which hammered out a new, specifically French form from the principles of classical art on which it was founded. Often as Europe has returned to antiquity, no new antique art has ever arisen. Every age has been convinced that it has found the key to the secret, every age has regarded earlier conceptions of antiquity as one-sided, erroneous and coloured by the taste of the day. To the eighteenth century—and not only to the Germans of the period—the interpretation of the age of Louis XIV already seemed pedantic and wrong; the Empire period looked down on both; and the present day looks down on the whole lot—and with equally little justification, no doubt : for the truth is that there are not one but many sides to antiquity, and that every man can get from it, as from every great work of literature, what is conformable to his nature.

To the Frenchman of the period, and after him to the whole of cultivated Europe, the precepts of Boileau, the tragedies of Racine, the paintings of Poussin and the architecture of Versailles seemed the perfect expression of the classical spirit, just as they seem to us the perfect expression of the spirit of their own century. They follow the rules of Aristotle or Vitruvius and are therefore "classical"; but the feeling which they express is that of their period, and it is the only thing that matters to us today. It was certainly a great achievement with the help of these re-discovered laws to restore that tradition of sound craftsmanship without which art cannot flourish and which only genius can afford to despise; but it is equally certain that the productions of the period would be quite dead if they were merely examples in illustration of rules, and those that were nothing more are dead.

The thing that was quite foreign to the ancient world but constitutes the very essence of the art of Louis XIV's time is the ideal of the court. It should be remembered that this ideal only reached its highest expression in Louis XIV's reign; it came into existence much earlier. The French classical convention was fixed by the plays of Corneille, which are constructed strictly on the classical model. They already exhibit those unities of time, place and action which Boileau demanded, and indeed Corneille, with his grandiose cult of heroism, is really a much more typical exponent of the Louis Quatorze ideal than his successor Racine, who was actually the King's contemporary. Racine's characters are also all kings and princesses, out of the classics or the Bible, but the spirit that animates them is quite different. Racine is the poet of love, of a courtly, formalised, regulated passion (it is only in his greatest work, *Phèdre*, that he bursts these bonds), which in itself makes him entirely unclassical and entirely French, as does the fact that he is above all things the painter of woman's

inner life. His plays are constructed like the park at Versailles, in whose severe symmetry his personages seem to be dancing a formal minuet. But it is not Athens or Rome to which they point us, it is—and this is what makes them still interesting today—the court of Versailles, and Louis and his mistresses and courtiers.

It is characteristic of Versailles that even love for the first time acquired its official etiquette there, that the king's mistresses became a public institution. The novelty lies not in the king's having mistresses, but in the fact that these mistresses were invested with an important official position.

The greatest dramatist of the period—the first of French, one of the first of European dramatists—is Molière. That is why he is independent of his age and less representative of its special character. It is a proof of Louis XIV's greatness that he thought highly of Molière and protected him from all attacks, even those of the clergy. For Molière only renders homage to the royal taste in the external form of his plays; their content is from every point of view revolutionary. His characters are neither princes nor aristocrats, but people of the middle and lower classes, modern Frenchmen, not classical heroes. He laughs at their weaknesses and lashes their vices, but these weaknesses and vices are those of humanity in every age, and his characters—the *Misanthrope*, *Tartuffe* and the rest—are universal types.

It is a significant fact about the French genius that its greatest exponents have achieved their greatest effect through satire, from Molière down to Anatole France. Molière takes us into the world not of Versailles but of Paris, which was thrust into the background during Louis XIV's reign by the overwhelming personality of the king. He became the founder of the *Comédie Française*. A first premonition, as it were, of the vengeance that Paris was to take on Versailles and the royal house, seems to run

through Molière's verses ; in them one feels the sharp, logical, unromantic spirit of Paris, which the pomp and circumstance of royalty seemed to have crushed, just as one does in the delicious fables of Lafontaine.

The French Academy, no less than the Comédie Française, owes its existence to Louis XIV. Architecture, sculpture and painting, literature and science received their home and their classrooms, in which the spirit of classical art, as the king understood it, was to reign supreme. The French Academy of Art is still haunted by this classical spirit, it still has its Institute in Rome, in order that its prize pupils may spend a few years studying in the "home of art".

The great painters of the period—Poussin and Claude Lorrain, for instance, not only Lebrun and his pupils—who decorated the palace of Versailles, worked in Rome and drew their inspiration from the antique. Yet their work is genuinely French. The grand, classical style of composition is combined with a wholly unclassical (and un-Italian) feeling for landscape and atmosphere, which only the North had known till then. Claude Lorrain discovered sunlight and was, through Turner, the begetter of the Impressionists. Poussin is the ancestor of Corot, and of Cézanne too. Here again the nordic suddenly joined hands with the classical, in a synthesis which makes the great creations of France exemplars of a truly European art.

The still famous "manufactories" were also established in Louis XIV's reign. Tapestry-weaving (Gobelins) and the manufacture of lace and silk were introduced into France at the instance of Colbert, the great administrator. Industry was fostered by protective tariffs, the fiscal and financial systems were overhauled, justice was reformed ; the whole state was reorganised from top to bottom and more and more completely centralised.

No matter what department one considers—art or

justice, finance or fortification, the same spirit is at work everywhere. All roads lead to Versailles, everything is relative to the king—that is what makes Versailles the epitome of the whole state and the whole period. This state is Louis XIV's great work of art, which every other prince admired and imitated ; with all its merits and all its faults, it is France's second great achievement.

A consideration of the end and after-effects of Louis XIV's work leads one to the conclusion that, while the faults of his system were the cause of its downfall, its after-effects were nevertheless enormous, but not at all in accordance with the wishes and intentions of the king.

The faults are all inter-connected. The king's passion for glory led to a perpetual series of conflicts and wars, and in the latter part of his reign fortune deserted him. The wars made hay of Colbert's carefully constructed financial and fiscal system ; to meet their cost the common people were squeezed dry, and as the country got poorer, they and the bourgeoisie became increasingly restive. That familiar by-product of war, the shady profiteer, also made his appearance. The nobility were ruined by the expenditure demanded of them. Absorbed in the life of the court, they neglected and mortgaged their estates, simply to raise money. At the same time they got tired of the rigid restrictions imposed by the ageing king and his bigoted mistress, Madame de Maintenon. Versailles, in fact, had become boring.

In the interests of uniformity Louis not only deprived the Protestants of their rights by revoking the Edict of Nantes, but also proceeded against the Jansenists, those " Protestants of Catholicism " : all subjects should profess the same faith as His Majesty. Thus he ended by becoming the best hated man in the kingdom, and his work, rotten at the core, only survived him a short time.

The fundamental defects of this system may be reduced

to two, one personal, the other of general significance. A despotic absolutism like his makes terrific demands on the man at the centre who is directing the whole vast machine. In this respect it is comparable with Bismark's system, which also stood and fell with its founder. For many years Louis XIV was equal to these self-imposed demands, but as he grew older he naturally ceased to be, and from that moment onwards only the faults and weak points in the structure showed themselves. It stands to reason that the system was bound to become a travesty of itself with an ordinary human being instead of a Louis XIV in charge. That, however, is not a reflection on Louis XIV but on his imitators. The second objection goes deeper ; it applies not only to this system but to a weakness of the Latin spirit in general—in other words, to rationalism.

For a rationalist, the human reason is the highest court of appeal ; but the human reason is a very limited thing. It excludes everything that is not amenable to the intellect, to logical thought—that is to say, everything in human nature that depends on feeling and instinct, i.e. first and foremost, life itself. Reason can only grasp what is fixed, formed, arrived, but life is always moving, always becoming. The ancient world was curiously insensitive to this latter fact, and the same deficiency has often shown itself in the French genius. It is only necessary to compare the histories of England and France to be convinced of the truth of this. The Frenchman thinks, considers, follows his ideas out to their logical conclusion, and out of the knowledge so gained lays down laws—laws of art and of politics, penal laws, constitutions and treaties. He over-rates thought as such, starting with the founder of his philosophy, Descartes, and his *Cogito, ergo sum*. Just as Lenôtre imposed his taste in shapes on the trees, so the Frenchman imposes what his reason tells him is right on life. But life is irrational, instinctive, perpetually changing.

The code has always failed to provide for just that particular offence, genius refuses to be bound even by the most reasonable laws of art in the world, and the best constitutions come to grief in practice, because they have failed to take account of human nature. Man is only a very partially reasonable animal.

The Englishman, on the other hand, has absolutely no theories, few written laws—and most of those quite obsolete—and no Academies. In politics he is invariably an opportunist : he does the right thing by instinct—only so has he been able to create and maintain his Empire, which rests on no constitution, nothing written, no definite conception even.

Carried to extremes, each way is as absurd and impracticable as the other ; individuals and nations invariably arrive at a compromise ; yet it remains true that the weakness of the French genius lies in the over-preponderance of reason. In its greatest moments and its greatest achievements it succeeds in striking the balance, but the *grand siècle* failed to do so. Its tremendous formalism, its political and social structure, in which the smallest detail was strictly regulated, perished through its own rigidity. The form became content, content withered away. New ideas, new movements were fermenting everywhere. Every class of the nation without exception was sick of discipline, new life was eager to burst the barriers ; and any sort of novelty was a challenge to the immutable rules and regulations laid down for all time by the king.

This cast-iron, corpse-like rigidity is the dark side to the *grand siècle*, and is responsible for the fact that the great age of France could not become Europe's great age, so that an epoch which many Frenchmen even now regard as the zenith of their country's career, is viewed by the rest of the world with coldness, if not positive antipathy. It is this spiritual tyranny that is the great objection to Louis XIV,

rather than the somewhat childish reproach of "despotism" in the sense of oppression of the people. For the truth is, paradoxical as it may sound, that it was Louis XIV who paved the way for the equality of all citizens, which was to become the ideal of the Revolution, and it is in this direction, little enough consonant with his intentions, that his work had such far-reaching results.

Versailles has rightly been called the grave of the French nobility. For the transformation of the great lords from almost independent princes, many of them quite as powerful as the king, into courtiers, freed the people from their often oppressive rule. The nation got one big tyrant instead of many small ones, but its first feeling was one of gratitude. The subordination of the nobility to the King was the finishing touch to that gradual conquest of the whole of France by the monarchy which had been going on since feudal times.

Louis XIV prepared the way for universal equality, in so far as he considered all subjects equal as compared with the king—equally negligible, that is. If the feudal state was a pyramid with the king at its apex, so ordered that the lower was always dependent on the higher, there was now a single peak towering so high above the plain that differences of level down below could no longer be distinguished from its eminence. The division between the aristocratic landowners living in the country and the urban bourgeoisie became less sharp; the former built themselves town houses and their mode of life approximated more and more to that of the latter. Without knowing it, the ruling class of France had already abdicated; their independence was a thing of the past, the nobles had become creatures of the king. No one except the king any longer had the right to raise troops, which is, of course, the cardinal point. The clergy also lost most of their power, even if they still directed consciences. With the king's

help the Jesuits, who stood for compromise with the world, triumphed over the severe and inflexible Jansenists. No one as yet dreamed of the levelling of classes as a possibility ; none the less, it was already on the way to realisation.

The processes of levelling and centralisation that were carried out during the *grand siècle* may be compared to the formation of a Trust. Where yesterday consumers were still in the hands of a vast number of producers, they find themselves today confronted by a single all-powerful unit, often a single individual, who has them entirely at his mercy. And the consequences are the same. One fine day the masses discover that it is they who are the losers by the concentration of all power in a single hand; when that happens, the first thing that occurs to them is to take over the existing centralised machine themselves and get rid of the boss. That is what happened in France at the Revolution, and in Russia when industry was rationalised. The sequel is also invariably the same—namely, a compromise in which power is shared between the masses and their (not always) new leaders. Louis XIV, the absolute monarch, was the involuntary founder of the modern democratic state. The transition from *L'état, c'est moi* to the king as the "first servant of the State" and thence to the abolition of the monarchy is simple and obvious.

Thus this epoch, like every other, has two aspects—one looking back to the past, the other forward to the future. Working on its conception of the antique, it created a French order with a set of rules governing art, thought and social life. It built up a state unexampled for its coherence and discipline, and in every department produced great men who laboured in this spirit. It influenced the ruling class throughout Europe, but only the ruling class, and spread French civilisation abroad; but that civilisation, being of the court, did not penetrate to the hearts of the

peoples. For no other nation was the French *grand siècle* also a great age. People imitated French models, they wrote and spoke and versified in French, wore French clothes and conformed to French etiquette, but the French genius had no fertilising influence. Its real gospel—the building up of a great, unified whole full of disciplined lucidity—was neither grasped nor followed by any other nation. What was significant and, in its way, sublime in France became preposterous or barbarous elsewhere. It was not the *grand siècle* but the after-effects which it brought in its train and which I have indicated above, that were of international importance and changed the face of Europe.

CHAPTER V

FÊTE GALANTE

THE eighteenth century, in contrast to its predecessor, has no definite, coherent character. Evolution quickens its pace, different intellectual and artistic phases succeed one another without achieving unity, and the artificial unity which consists in taking a king's reign as equivalent to a "period"—e.g. treating the Louis XV period as a unit which succeeded the unit of the Louis XIV period—is as superficial as it is erroneous. It is only justifiable where a great monarch really leaves his mark on a period, as Louis XIV did on his. For his successors this was completely out of the question.

The French eighteenth century only seems homogeneous when it is contrasted with its predecessor. Its predecessor was monarchical, clerical, devoted to law and order, which it established; the age of a strictly disciplined, artistically constructed national culture. The eighteenth century was an age of liberation—anti-clerical, anti-Christian, critical and subversive in every field. With it came the revolt against excessive coercion; it was cosmopolitan instead of nationalistic, analytical rather than constructive, revolutionary in spirit, without an inkling that this spiritual revolution would materialise itself before the century was over.

The death of Louis XIV was hailed with relief by the whole nation, and the court most of all. Under the good-natured, weak-willed Regent the joy of life which had so

long been repressed burst forth and an age of sensuous enjoyment of every kind, almost unique in history, began.

The first bands that the eighteenth century loosed were those of hypocrisy, and the society thus liberated was one which had carried refinement to its highest pitch. This was the age which saw the supreme and final flowering of aristocratic civilisation, a flowering so exquisite that the world cannot forget it even now and looks back to it with longing. It is above all of this, of the *douceur de vivre* of the old regime, that people think, especially in France, when they speak of the eighteenth century; this atmosphere that people seek to recapture when they collect furniture, pictures, porcelain and brocades of the period. It is the accepted quintessence of the eighteenth century, the thing that a Frenchman associates with the word *dix-huitième* and the German with *Rokoko*. In doing so people not only forget from what filth this flower grew, on what a basis of misery and brutalisation this brilliant society rested, but also overlook the fact that it only embodies one side of the eighteenth century, and that the description of that century as the age of *fêtes galantes* is far from exhaustive. From the point of view of the unprejudiced observer, the last-named objection is more serious than the first. The, gay, light-hearted, sensual society of the period is ethically reprehensible because it rested on the misery of the masses which alone made it possible; it requires, like the Renaissance, to be assessed aesthetically. Considered in this light, it is unquestionably one of the great achievements not merely of French but of European culture. It is the pattern of civilised social life, and, as such, one of France's great gifts to Europe.

This age has the *salon* for its epitome, as the age of Louis XIV has Versailles; it is the age of an urbanised, Parisianised aristocracy. Versailles had gigantic state apartments; the eighteenth century went in for *salons* and

boudoirs, it discovered the intimate living-room. Shapes became looser and less static, and grew capricious and amusing, like the occupants of the rooms—especially the female occupants; for it is the age that enthroned the lady, the age of the Pompadour more than of her royal lover. The social supremacy of women, which has come to be typical of France, dates from the Pompadour. She is the incarnation of the age of gallantry; “Life has no meaning apart from pleasure” is her doctrine. Religion is a question of forms that need not be taken too seriously (the abbés surpassed even the laymen in gallantry), politics are tedious and unimportant, social questions do not exist for Society; one is here to amuse oneself as best one can, without bothering about the future which, after all, one will not live to see, or the next world in which one does not believe. These people have no prejudices, because prejudices would only get in the way of their pleasures; they mix with the bourgeoisie if the latter have enough money and know how to behave—titles can be bought now. They fill their salons with artists, philosophers and wits, and shut both eyes to questions of morality. Marriage is an absurd institution if it tries to exact fidelity; any irregularity is permissible so long as it does not outrage good taste.

Good taste, tact, manners are the supreme deities; not what you do but how you do it counts. Nothing is more alien to the period than crude, unbridled sensuality or strong passion. It is no Renaissance, with poison and dagger in the background. Love is a game to these people like everything else, because they know, though they will not admit it to themselves, that nothing matters. They like brilliant conversation pursued for its own sake, not to throw light on problems in which nobody is interested. Their dress is the last word in exquisiteness, compounded of the very finest silks and laces and jewellery, but it remains

light and graceful and avoids the magnificent : the *négligé* is an invention of this period. They powdered, painted, stuck little patches in the places to which they wished to draw an admirer's attention, and devised the whole armoury of coquetry, from which it still draws its weapons all the world over. The lady became a perfect work of art, and a French ideal of feminine beauty, which is the archetype of the modern Parisienne, established itself. It is not in the least classical—that would be tedious—not really beautiful at all in the conventional sense, but charming and piquant. On the other hand, it is not in the least “decadent” or hypersensitive either—these people were still a long way from that ; being French, they were far too gay, for one thing. Faces are round, with little snub noses and merry eyes, figures graceful, slender, but rounded. The whole effect suggests *esprit*. It is not enough for a woman to be pretty, because men would not be satisfied with that ; she must be clever, amusing, witty and on the spot. She is interested in all the arts and often practises them herself, reads everything and can talk about it ; she is, in fact, cultivated in the true sense of the word, but the very reverse of a pedantic blue-stockings. It is marvellous what a fascination this ideal of womanhood still possesses. No epoch in history has been so constantly described in books, plays and pictures, none has remained so much alive ; and the theme of all these works is Woman.

It is this aroma of highly refined sexuality which she exhales that never loses its charm. It still operates in the newest of the arts, that of the film : the Pompadour, the Dubarry and the Rococo period are revived again and again, and the public never seems to grow weary of them. The reason is that this period is the golden age of one of the main themes of all art, namely sex. The other, more fundamental, theme of religion had been dead since the Gothic period, and the social one had not yet been

discovered. The art which this age produced, and to which it owes its survival, is a blend of sex and *esprit*.

It was an age of painting—and of music, which did not, however, achieve its greatest triumphs in France. All the arts subsist in every age, of course ; yet one or the other of them is always in the ascendant because it is most congenial to the spirit of that particular time. The *grand siècle* was constructive and architectonic, the eighteenth century analytical and pictorial. The former imposed an architectural structure on all art and even on life itself, the latter turned everything into pictures. A whole series of new colours made their appearance, tender, exquisite shades of shades, like *bleu mourant*, *cuisse de nymphe*, *vert d'eau*. Everything was light, airy, shimmering and indefinite, dissolved in sunlight and air.

Architecture remained classical. The big buildings of the period (the Panthéon and the rest) have nothing of its spirit. That took refuge in the little palaces and, above all, in interiors. "The heaven of the period is a ceiling", someone has said. There, and over mirrors and doors, the gay nymphs and half-naked goddesses of the Rococo Olympus, the amoretti and zephyrs and little clouds disport themselves; everything has grown light, airy, gay, care-free and frivolous—a drawing-room *in excelsis*. These people discovered the pale, gleaming beauty of porcelain and raved over *chinoiseries*; time and space were left behind in their games, life was one long perfumed bliss. Oil paint seemed to them too heavy, too earth-bound ; so they invented pastel, to catch the last, most subtle vibrations of light.

Fragonard painted his light, airy, cunningly contrived pictures, which look so simple and are so incredibly subtle, and Latour got the whole spirit of the period into his rapid pastel strokes. His figures are full of strength, for all their blurred outline. Nothing is wider of the mark

than to regard the art and spirit of this period as sugary; there is great strength underneath its conscious delicacy. Chardin—a more refined sort of Dutchman who has strayed to Paris—revealed the charm of everyday things as a theme for the painter. But the greatest name of the period is Watteau : it is he who is responsible for the image of it that has remained stamped on the world's memory. His masterpiece, *L'embarquement pour Cythère*, is for Rococo what Versailles is for the age of Louis XIV—a work of art that epitomises its period. It epitomises it, because it does not merely hold the mirror up to it but gives expression to its secret ideal, because it is significant, in fact. Watteau is not the painter of Rococo society, but the visionary who solved its problem : that society was gay, he is melancholy. He is the genius who divines the hidden reality behind appearance, who at high noon already feels the sunset coming. He is a tragic figure, because he realises that all this smiling world of *fêtes galantes* is merely the last flicker of a dying society, that the host who presides over this banquet is Death. The island of Cytherea, lost in the haze of the distance, is the bourne of love and of death. No doubt because he was himself ill and foresaw his early death, he discovered the death's head behind the mask of Society too. He thus became the interpreter of his age, the unique charm of which is bound up with the fact that it is the end of a chapter, a sunset, a flower that soon fades, an irrevocable farewell, a sinking ship.

While the elect of Society pursued their dream-lives in careless gaiety, it was blowing up for a storm in the night outside. Unsuccessful wars had destroyed the last vestiges of the country's prosperity, the common people were impoverished and brutalised. The whole nation was soaked in scepticism : old mistakes were coming home to roost. With the expulsion of the Protestants, the Church

imagined that it had broken down all resistance, but the place of the severely religious Protestants had been taken by free-thinkers, a much more dangerous enemy, and its whole frame was swaying. The monarchy had become a joke, the royal mistresses were hussies, the army inefficient, the national finances in ruins. The entire political and social fabric was tottering ; meanwhile Society, the coping-stone of the building, had no idea that the foundations had given way, and imagined that the general collapse would leave it undisturbed.

Gradually, however, the new ideas made their way into its strongholds too. Times changed, the music of the feast died away, and the dancing shadows dissolved into nothingness.

The dream of the age of gallantry was over, and became merely the memory of a dream, the memory of a lost paradise, of that *douceur de vivre*, of which those who had experienced it would one day say that only this age knew what it was, that since then it had disappeared from the world for ever.

The care-free life of the senses, unburdened by social consciousness, the pursuit of beauty for its own sake, have had their last day : we are on the threshold of the age of Enlightenment.

CHAPTER VI

VOLTAIRE

THE Enlightenment originated in the *salon*. It proceeded from the influence exercised on aristocratic society by the *Philosophes*, who were successful in converting a portion of that society to their ideas. It was mostly aristocrats who took up the cudgels for the new notions that were bound to lead to their own downfall. Polite society began to develop a social conscience and became aware of moral obligations, thereby pronouncing its own condemnation. Having cast off every restraint itself, it was now ready to admit others to this freedom, not realising that its own freedom depended on the servitude of those others, and that the mob would just as certainly shake off the domination of the aristocracy as the aristocracy had shaken off the power of the King and the Church. The aristocracy was free; so were the rich, as their money enabled them to buy titles, complete with privileges and exemption from taxation; all the rest were slaves. The first necessity was to liberate their minds, to give them access to those truths which the leading brains in the nation had recognised. There was no freedom either of speech or pen, no parliament and no press. Intellectual liberation was inevitably the work of a few isolated individuals, who created a movement and were prepared to take all the risks involved, from motives of unselfish enthusiasm. The fact that such men were forthcoming in France at this period had a decisive effect on the whole development of Europe,

and its influence can be felt even in our own day. The modern world started in the *salons* of Paris; and the enlightenment which issued from them, with all its consequences, is France's greatest achievement and greatest service to Europe in modern times.

It is undeniable that the inspiration in this case came from England, but that does not detract from the merits of France. The political and social developments that subsequently took place on the Continent had long been an accomplished fact in England, but England's example had had no effect on Europe. For many years now—the process began somewhere about Elizabeth's time—England had been a separate continent, with a path of its own to pursue, exercising no influence on the evolution of Europe and itself untouched by it—an island whose interests lay on the sea, from which it had driven, and would continue to drive, all competitors. It had long ago carried out those internal reforms which still lay before the Continent, had broken the power of the Church, beheaded its king, and evolved a system of parliamentary government under a constitutional ruler, with equal rights for all and freedom of speech, pen and conscience. And the Continent had remained completely unaffected! The liberation of the Continent dates from Voltaire's—and Montesquieu's—sojourn in England, from the decisive impressions they then received and their determination to reproduce on French soil what they had seen there. What was looked upon in those days as an unheard-of demand has by now become so much a matter of course that we have ceased to feel either satisfaction at the progress we have achieved or gratitude towards the men who made it possible. "Mediæval" is our word today for the state of things in the eighteenth century before the enlightenment, and justly so; for in many respects the Middle Ages continued on the Continent until the arrival of Voltaire—which

brings them uncommonly near to us in time. We take equality before the law as a matter of course, but the opposite was equally a matter of course in the days before Voltaire. It stands to reason now that the man with the larger income, the greater possessions, pays more taxes, but that was a revolutionary notion in those days.

The aristocracy and the clergy, and the rich in general (as they could always buy a title), were exempt from all taxation worth mentioning; each class was taxed on a different basis, the heaviest burdens falling on the poorest. Today there is no longer any difference of opinion as to whether power is vested in the people, but only as to how far the rule of the people is direct or indirect; in those days it was an accepted axiom that power is a matter of "divine right" and is vested in the sovereign. Freedom of conscience seemed wholly incompatible with the security of the state, freedom of the written or the printed word a mad Utopian dream. God had put the king, the nobles and the clergy where they were; what they did was right, to attack them was blasphemy. They had the rights, other people the duties; it was their business to decide on questions of religion and politics, on what might be written, said and even thought, and other people's to obey. Here, as always, the instrument by which the masses were kept under was ignorance. The deadly enemy was doubt—doubt as to the justice of the heaven-sent order, and the doctrines of the Church which asserted it. That is why scepticism is the creative principle of this epoch; the masses had to be taught to doubt, to become as sceptical in their attitude towards their rulers as those rulers themselves had long been towards the principles they embodied. This led to the idea of the *Encyclopædia*, which carried all the leading spirits of the age away with it. The idea was to produce a work containing the truth about everything—not what the Church had taught as truth, but the

opposing truth of human reason, based on knowledge, observation, facts, scientific investigation, the free-thinker's truth. This creation of theirs became the main interest of the *Philosophes'* lives, and the Encyclopædists, under their spokesman Diderot, became a political party. In the struggle over the Encyclopædia, the publication of which was prohibited three times, they and the aristocrats in league with them saw their life's work. Never has greater respect been paid to the power of the printed word and the weapons of the intellect than in the age enlightenment, and never has such confidence justified itself more brilliantly.

In this contest Voltaire also took a leading part, but his greatest battles were fought single-handed. Injustice, intolerance, superstition were the forces against which he fought all his life long wherever he came across them, in every possible way and with any and every weapon. This is the guiding thread which runs right through his work, with all its variety and unevenness, as it does through his checkered and eventful life; the unquenchable idealism which puts all his weaknesses, both as man and artist, in the shade.

His tragedies, so much admired by his contemporaries, are unreadable today; so are his epic, the *Henriade*, and his satire, *La Pucelle*: yet they all grew out of his enthusiasm for toleration and liberty, and his hatred for their enemies. Of all his works, the short philosophic tales have worn best. But it is not so much his writings as his personality that has continued to influence mankind. No writer before him ever wielded such political and moral power, never has the intellect, as such, enjoyed such prestige. Voltaire had to bring nearly all his works out under pseudonyms; wherever they showed their faces in France they were banned, destroyed, burnt, so greatly was their influence feared. He himself was forced to spend the greater part of his life in exile: it was only as an old

man of eighty-four that he returned to Paris, to die. Yet this victim of perpetual persecution was the spiritual and intellectual ruler of Europe. Frederick the Great was his pupil and disciple, in spite of all their petty squabbles; Catherine the Great sat at his feet, Joseph II is unthinkable without him. It is still a far cry from him to the notion of revolution : he looked for salvation to the enlightenment and liberation of the masses through the agency of the rulers and the upper classes, whose mentality he revolutionised. The boudoir of the polite world became in his hands a shrine of militant free thought. While the age that preceded him had been wholly devoted to beauty, wholly artistic and aesthetic, his own was all for the intellect, full of ethical aims and ends. It was the age of scepticism, of the break-up of the old faith and the old ideals, yet at the same time constructive in the realm of ideals, thanks to Voltaire. For the thing that, more than all his works put together, made every champion of liberty worship him was his intervention on behalf of the victims of injustice or intolerance, his indefatigable and wholly unselfish exertions in the cause of Calas, of the Chevalier de la Barre, of Sirveu—the victims of the law and the Church. In this way he became the dominating moral force of his age, the keeper of Europe's conscience. Voltaire is a symbolic figure ; he represents one mode of perfection of the human spirit. The Goethean ideal is to make a man's whole intellectual activity minister to the highest perfection of his personality : his work, considered by itself, matters little, its effects not at all. At the other end of the scale is the type of the intellectual who sacrifices his life to his work—a Michelangelo, a Rembrandt or a Hölderlin. The Oriental ideal is embodied in Lao-tse, in the wisdom which renounces personality in favour of union with the All. Voltaire, on the other hand, represents the purely European type of mind at its highest, he is the ideal

rationalist and utilitarian. In virtue of him, the eighteenth century marks the zenith of that intensive development of the intellect, peculiar to Europe, which began with the Renaissance and was to end in the bankruptcy of the twentieth century. Voltaire is the type of intellectual for whom intellect and art are only means to action, who cares neither for the full development of his personality nor for artistic achievement nor for inner harmony, nor for anything else in the world but influence over his fellows. His pen was a sword, his satire the weapon with which he overwhelmed his opponents and made mincemeat of the great wielders of authority in his day—a rotten church, a conscienceless monarchy and a corrupt judicature. The fact that instead of calling sinners to repentance he ridicules them is what makes him so typically French ; for nowhere but in France, indeed nowhere but in Paris, is this inimitable blend of grace, gaiety, irony and ridicule, behind which lurks the greatest moral seriousness, to be found. He reforms by amusing.

With Voltaire, the son of the Parisian bourgeoisie, a bourgeois ascended the throne for the first time. Voltaire is a king among kings : one has only to read his predecessors' grovelling prefaces and dedications to great people to realise the effect Voltaire had on the standing of the intellectual and the degree of respect accorded to him. And if this respect is even now nowhere so great as in France, that is because Voltaire was a Frenchman. Since his time the French intellectuals have sat in judgment over the country's rulers and their right to do so has been recognised; before him they were their lackeys. *Through Voltaire France restored the intellect to its rightful position, which it had lost in Europe since the days of Athens.* Therein lies the true significance of Voltaire, and that is what France did for Europe in this section of the eighteenth century.

Voltaire ought to be the patron saint of journalists : as it is, he is merely their forerunner, the first journalist. What would he not have given for a free press and a newspaper at his disposal to help him in his fight for justice !

The Press and its freedom, and service in it, are the fulfilment of his ambition, for they imply intellectual freedom. That this freedom could be misused did not enter his head—no champion of liberty ever sees the dark side to his ideal. It never occurred to him that people would later on sell this freedom and commercialise it.

Voltaire stamps his age as that of “victorious Analysis”, as Carlyle called it ; next to him, even his most important coadjutors are almost forgotten. First among these stands Montesquieu, in virtue of his *Esprit des lois*, in which the fundamental principles of the modern state are set forth : he is another channel by which English ideas reached the Continent. Montesquieu demands the separation, which we now regard as axiomatic, of legislature, executive and justice, so that, instead of a single absolute power having control of everything, each should act as a check on the others—*pouvoir arrête pouvoir*. It is typical of our present spiritual confusion that the throwing overboard of this rational principle, which cost so much effort to establish, can be welcomed as progress, and a dictatorship hailed with joy ; but it will no doubt always be the case that in reacting against the defects of a system that was once extolled as the only way of salvation, people forget its good points. Today, when we have witnessed the bankruptcy of rationalism and are entering upon a new era with our course set in the diametrically opposite direction, it is particularly necessary to point out that it was in its own day an immense step forward, and that there could be no greater mistake than to condemn it and its results because it has ended by becoming a caricature

of itself. We must get beyond it, not fall back behind it. Because a great portion of the Press is corrupt, we are not therefore justified in crying up the censorship and the muzzling of opinion ; because physical science has its limitations, we may not therefore repudiate science and try to get back to the stage of infantile credulity ; nor must the manifest imperfections of democracy and the parliamentary system lead us to believe in the superiority of imaginary supermen. In short, the fact that every newly-won liberty is put to some illegitimate uses is no reason for condemning liberty on principle.

In spite, therefore, of all the one-sidedness of the age of enlightenment, and all its catastrophic consequences, which may make it antipathetic to us today, we must have sufficient objectivity to respect it for what it was—an age of enormous progress for the human race.

If the purely artistic yield of the period is insignificant compared with its intellectual results, that is not surprising. Every age has its ideal, which alone seems really important to it, and for which it neglects everything else in greater or less degree : in the age we have been discussing all energy was directed towards one ideal, that of intellectual and spiritual liberation. From the purely literary and artistic point of view the period is completely negligible, with the lachrymose bourgeois comedies of Diderot, the great encyclopædist, and the sickly innocence of Greuze. It is an age without lyric poetry and without feeling, a critical age : people no longer wanted to enjoy things, they wanted to criticise.

Lyric poetry, the drama and the epic were dead ; the novel, a much more intellectual form of art, began with Prévost and Lesage. But the whole art of the period mattered little to France and not at all to Europe. The *fête galante* period was the last in which art was still of first-rate importance—a position it has still

to regain. The age of enlightenment was the first age to base itself exclusively on the intellect and to operate only through it, and the result is that it can appeal to nothing else.

CHAPTER VII

ROUSSEAU

IN all historical writing one is forced, if one is to get a clear picture, to mention individuals and movements in succession, even when they run parallel to each other or intersect in time ; for in every age there are several generations, with contradictory notions and ideals, living together, and people of the same age may belong mentally to different generations. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was Voltaire's contemporary ; he was born after him and died in the same year ; yet he represents the generation that followed Voltaire. The movement which he let loose was a reaction against Voltairean rationalism, even though it may be just as violently opposed to the pre-Voltairean point of view as Voltaire's itself was. Rousseau recognised the injustice and untenability of the existing social and political system as fully as Voltaire and was equally anxious to reform it ; but he condemned not merely Voltaire's methods but his ideals. Enlightenment, had it penetrated to all classes, would have raised all to the mental level of the *Philosophes*, turned everyone into an intellectual ; the knowledge and the freedom that were confined to a narrow circle would have become universal ; in a word, the masses would have been raised to the intellectual level of the best of the privileged classes. It is an ideal of culture, which it was hoped would destroy superstition and sweep away abuses, and of reform directed by the upper classes with the object of improving the lot of the lower. The reign

of reason was to abolish the evils and abuses of the existing system, but the system itself was never called in question. A rationally governed people, rationally divided into classes, was to be allowed to enjoy the rights that reason sanctioned and a reasonable measure of liberty in everything—as in England. Voltaire—and the ideal of enlightenment—is the spiritual father of Liberalism, and of the political parties which call themselves democratic today.

Rousseau, on the other hand, is the father of Communism ; and just as these two progressive parties hate each other even more than they both hate the reactionaries, so did Rousseau and his spiritual issue hate rationalism and enlightenment.

So far from making it his ideal to raise the masses to the level of the privileged few, Rousseau regards the latter with peculiar hatred and contempt and places all his hopes in their destruction. So far from wanting reason to triumph he regards it as the root of all evil, and its great achievements, science and art, as the arch-enemies of mankind. In his ideals, if not in his practical proposals, he is not a social reformer but a destroyer. Man, according to him, is naturally good, for nature is good, but society corrupts him.

Rousseau's starting-point is this: —Nature has created man good, free and happy; it is society and civilisation that have made him wicked, enslaved and miserable. The great crime of civilisation is the inequality to which it gives rise, and this inequality is based on inequality of property. The higher the civilisation, the sharper these contrasts become; the propertied classes become the educated classes as well, spiritual differences are added to material. Art and science are by-products of the ill-gotten luxury of the rich, which is based on the oppression and impoverishment of the masses. What Rousseau preaches is not a return to

primitive nature, which is impossible, but a new society which is to arise from a new education of the individual. Instinct and feeling are to be cultivated and developed in the child; reason and knowledge can wait till later. Inter-course between the sexes is to be free and honest, the family, and especially motherhood, sacred. These free, happy mortals are then freely to form a society by renouncing their individuality in the interests of the community (the Social Contract); authority thus proceeding from them all, they still remain free, while the government they have themselves elected sees to it that equality is maintained.

Rousseau's gospel is thus an out-and-out "slave-morality", as Nietzsche called it; and it is a simple matter to trace all the fundamental principles and demands of socialism and communism back to him. They are already implicit in the notion that property is the root of all evil, while the second idea—that all power must come from below (since the superstructure is to disappear)—contains the seeds of the Revolution, universal suffrage and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is Rousseau's spirit that rules the world today, even though his works may go almost unread.

Rousseau was a Genevese, a *citoyen* and a Protestant. Geneva is the source of his republican ideal and his preference for small states, in which his ideas would, of course, be more easily realisable. The idea of equality came natural to the citizen of a free city, the moral demand and the appeal to the individual conscience to the Protestant—in this respect he was the forerunner of Kant, who acknowledged the fact. Rousseau grew up in the bosom of nature: hence his aversion from civilisation and his hatred of the *salon* with its *esprit*, in which he cut a pitiable figure; hence, no doubt, also the value he attached to unspoiled primitive simplicity as against the corruption

of urban society. Rousseau is full of *ressentiment*, another trait linking him with the revolutionary thought of today. He is a connecting-link between the primitive Christianity of Roman times and Bolshevism; his most fervent disciple was Robespierre.

His importance lies in the intensity of his feelings, not in the originality of his thought. These two components of the human spirit, intellect and feeling, are perpetually at odds, and every age is dominated by one or the other. Since the last great "age of feeling" in France, which was the Gothic, intellect had been gradually getting more and more complete control, there as elsewhere in Europe, reaching its zenith in the age of Voltaire. Rousseau was the leader of the great reaction in favour of feeling, the first "Gothic man" since the beginning of the Renaissance. With him the non-classical element in the French character re-asserted itself in France for the first time. His strength lies in his tremendous capacity for feeling, in his lyrical, poetical and musical qualities, and this is the explanation of his success. The brilliant society of the *salons* was inwardly barren, bored by its own *esprit* and its superior scepticism, *blasé* and disillusioned; and therefore enthusiastically took up Rousseau's ideas and put them into practice after its fashion.

It became the thing to be "natural"; ladies fed their babies themselves—preferably in the drawing-room or at the opera; clothes became simpler, cotton taking the place of silk; gardens became "English", i.e. unsymmetrical and as nature made them. The epitome of this aristocratic pose of naturalness, to which the present day offers so many parallels, is Marie Antoinette's village in the grounds of the Trianon, where the Queen played at milk-maids and all ceremony was rigorously barred, the company imagining that in this charming way they were meeting the demands of the new age.

Rousseau ushered in the age of sensibility and sentimentality. That was the one part of his teaching that Society grasped, and it found a new charm in this orgy of feeling. Rousseau first discovered the majesty of mountain, forest and water, fresh air and wide horizons, the whole mighty life of nature, in which he set his dream of a new-born humanity—and Society turned it into pastorals and sham villages.

By his lyricism, his subjectivism, his reverence for nature and longing for the innocence of Eden, he is the precursor of the Romantics, as he is of the Expressionists by his *Confessions*. There is hardly one vital idea in the present strong reaction in favour of feeling that cannot be traced back to Rousseau. Be it Moscow dictators or German Expressionists, South-Sea gush or Tolstoyism, the *Wandervogel* movement, winter sports, or nudism—Rousseau is the father of all enthusiasts.

The direct influence he had on Schiller (*The Robbers*) and Goethe (*The Sorrows of Werther*), for instance, to mention only the greatest, pales before the vast influence he is still exercising, and will long continue to exercise, on the whole of Europe.

Even in his own lifetime, his effect on the middle and lower classes was, of course, incomparably greater than on high society, with which he had absolutely no points of contact. He became the apostle of the poor and oppressed—the personality and spirit of Rousseau altogether offer many parallels to those of St. Paul—and the Revolution would never have happened but for the motive power of his enthusiasm. Its fervent belief in the possibility of making mankind happy and determination to do so, and, on the other side, its murderous and bloody excesses were equally Rousseau's work, being the two sides of the liberation of feeling from the control of reason. The Revolution began in the spirit of Voltaire but took on

more and more of Rousseau's as it went on. Rousseau is the real creator of the new age.

It seems that all the greatest spirits have their greatest effect long after they are dead. The age of Goethe, it has been truly said, has not yet begun; the age of Voltaire coincided with the triumph of Liberalism, that of Rousseau began with the collapse of Europe. Voltaire and Rousseau are fighting today for the control of the modern mind, for the future of the white race.

Voltaire and Rousseau, their work and its consequences, are, since Gothic times, France's greatest claim to fame, her greatest gift to the world.

Rousseau died a short time before the outbreak of the Revolution. The last years of the *ancien régime* are of no importance, a mere petering-out and waiting for what was coming. A new classical reaction set in, but it had no inner force; it was mere classicism, an affair of fashion. In the Louis XVI style aristocratic culture made one more effort to summon up what powers of resistance it had left, but of the great classical tradition nothing remained beyond a graceful toying with antique ornamentation, and the last refinements of the lady, who was soon to disappear from the stage of history where she had queened it for so long. There are no more great names: no Watteau, but a Greuze; no Rousseau, but a St. Pierre with his sentimental tales of love and nature—clever journeyman-work without soul. Out of boredom Society took to superstition and ran after Cagliostro and Mesmer. Beyond the seas there arose, with France's help, a free America, the first realisation of the great conceptions of the eighteenth century; yet none of these great ladies and gentlemen seemed to realise the significance of that event for themselves. The appearance of Beaumarchais on the scenes and the production of his *Figaro*, the *folle journée*, marks the dramatic close of a dying age. "The King has

forbidden it, so it will be performed ”, said Beaumarchais, and the event justified him. Marie Antoinette herself insisted that this revolutionary piece should be given, and carried her point.

The entire aristocracy flocked to the Odéon, and tumultuous applause rang through the house at every sentence aimed against aristocracy, monarchy, privilege. Everything is done in *Figaro* to exhibit the proletarian in a favourable light, the great lord and his associates in an unfavourable one : the whole play is one long attack on the audience which applauded it with wild enthusiasm. The shadow of the guillotine looms in the background.

The grace of Rococo and sensuality carried to its highest pitch of refinement—Watteau, in short; Reason triumphant and the star of Voltaire’s crystal-clear rationalism shining high over all Europe; the mighty outburst of the dark waters of feeling, gushing forth once more from sources that seemed to have dried up and destined, with Rousseau, to overwhelm the whole Continent; the feeble fading-out and decay of a society which had given itself up and pronounced its own condemnation: —such is the French eighteenth century, the most fateful era in the history of France.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MARSEILLAISE

THE French Revolution is the materialisation, the translation into fact, of the ideas of Voltaire and Rousseau. Its importance lies not in having produced new ideas, but in having converted ideas into realities. It proclaims the victory of mind over force, and shows that a really vital ideal can find means to realise itself. The Revolution is France's second Crusade. Like the Crusades—and this differentiates the French Revolution from the English, to which it owed so much in the sphere of ideas, from the very beginning—it was a movement extending far beyond the borders of France. Its object was not to alter conditions in France but to herald and propagate a new gospel of humanity. The question at issue was not merely Monarchy versus Republic—that only became acute owing to the conduct of the royal family—but whether the people are entitled to set up a political system and a government in accordance with their wishes, whether power properly belongs to them or is derived from God. The divine origin of power and its delegation to the royal house is the cornerstone of the old French monarchy. In principle, the revolutionaries had nothing against its conversion into a constitutional monarchy, in which the king receives power, and wields it, through the will of the people; but it was precisely this notion of the sovereignty of the people that the *ancien régime* would not accept at any price. It was clear from the beginning that these two ideals could not

exist side by side, that the victory of popular ideas in France would certainly mean the end of divine right everywhere, and this made it inevitable that all the sovereigns of Europe should league themselves against the Revolution. The struggle is not over yet; it has taken more than a century for the demands raised in Paris in the eighteenth century to win their way to recognition in Russia; but every European state had to bow to the ideas of the Revolution sooner or later.

It is exceedingly difficult, perhaps even impossible, to take up an objective attitude to the French Revolution. The amount it destroyed, in order to reconstruct, was colossal, which is in itself enough to damn it in the eyes of the conservatively inclined; but it also had recourse, partly through force of circumstances and partly of its own choice, to such barbarous methods of beating down opposition, departed so often and so far from its own ideals, that it progressively alienated the sympathies of its supporters and finally collapsed amid the execration of the masses it had freed. Not even the most convinced supporter of Rousseau will be able to approve the behaviour of his most enthusiastic prophet, Robespierre—unless he has taken for his own the maxim of the Jesuits that the end justifies the means.

The French Revolution presents the picture that is always to be found when ideas materialise themselves and theory becomes practice. The philosopher or theorist moves in the world of the intellect, he is a man of reason; but human nature is unreasonable and governed by instinct.

The over-estimation of reason and logical thought, that besetting sin of the French, came home to roost with fatal results in the Revolution. The intellectual leaders wanted justice, but the mob wanted vengeance; Rousseau wished for the voluntary submission of citizens possessing equal rights to an authority chosen by themselves, but the revolu-

tionaries aimed at personal power. Thus the gospel of justice and brotherly love turned into the Terror and the guillotine.

The fault was not, of course, all on the side of the revolutionaries, but at least as much on that of their opponents. The King and Queen, the aristocracy and the clergy never gave way except on compulsion, and they were ready to withdraw the concessions they had made at any moment, should they be strong enough to do so. The Queen sought help against the people of France among foreign rulers, the *émigrés* took service in foreign armies, and the majority of the clergy remained irreconcilable; in short, the Revolution became a simple struggle for power, or rather for mere existence.

In the course of this struggle of the revolutionaries against the King and the aristocracy an entirely new phenomenon, of decisive importance for the future, made its appearance in the shape of a consciousness of nationality. It was unknown to the eighteenth century; European civilisation, then almost entirely confined to the upper classes, was French, but political interests and matters of culture were kept rigidly apart. For instance, many Frenchmen were enthusiastic adherents of Frederick the Great and hailed his victories over the French army as a triumph for enlightenment, while Frederick himself was saturated in French culture and had the most complete contempt for the Germans as barbarians from this point of view.

The wars and mercenary armies of the dynasties were habitually looked upon as their personal affair; nobles of any nation might be found cheerfully serving in the army against which the ruler of their native land happened to be fighting, and mercenaries of every nationality were recruited anywhere or even sold outright by their benevolent and paternal sovereigns.

The original idea behind the Revolution was the liberation of all men from the yoke of divinely appointed subjection, but when all the rulers of Europe took up arms against it, the first necessity for the revolutionaries was to defend their own handiwork, i.e. the French Revolution. That is how the revolutionary wars came to awaken the idea of nationality. The whole nation suddenly found itself with a common vital interest, which had to be defended against external foes, who had come to the help of the enemy within the gates. Vast crowds of volunteers flocked to the colours, inspired by a burning enthusiasm, and these citizen-hordes, which the professional armies of their opponents regarded with supreme contempt, were soon winning decisive victories. Nationalists in every country ought to put up a monument to the French Revolution; for it was through the Revolution, and its heir, Napoleon, that the consciousness of nationality was first awakened in the European peoples.

It would certainly have disappeared again very soon if the Revolution had caught on in other countries too. The beginning of the Revolution was hailed with delight by the leading spirits of all countries (Goethe and Schiller in Germany, etc., etc.), and it is equally certain that the oppressed masses everywhere would joyfully have followed the French example had they been strong enough to do so. A European success on the part of the Revolution would pretty certainly have led to the immediate establishment of a European Republic; but Fate willed it otherwise, with the result that the Revolution became a purely French achievement, which the French nation had to defend against the rest of the world.

It was this necessity for self-defence that led to the execution of the King and Queen, who were, rightly or wrongly, believed to be in league with the foreigner, and of the aristocrats who were associated with the *émigrés*, to

the Terror and finally, by an inevitable process, to the dictatorship.

As things turned out, the French nation had to bear the cost of the progress which the Revolution ended by achieving for the whole of Europe. Political and intellectual freedom, the end of the feudal state, of ecclesiastical power and aristocratic privilege, the creation of modern constitutional and parliamentary government—all these things, which the whole of Europe has achieved, are the work of France, and France has had to foot the bill almost alone.

This is undoubtedly France's greatest gift to Europe.

The fact that enthusiasm for what the French Revolution did has cooled down a great deal since, if not positively given place to its opposite, must not be allowed to make us under-estimate or deny its significance. A major revolution can only succeed when the thing it destroys has become an obstacle to natural development, and the thing it sets up is a necessity of human nature; on the other hand it is equally certain that it stands for no "eternal" truths and is in any case unable to give effect to what it regards as truth in an unadulterated form. What actually happens is invariably that the old and the new coalesce, after more or less violent swings of the pendulum in the revolutionary and reactionary directions, to form something that is neither the new nor the old, and consequently leaves the extremists on both sides dissatisfied—which is no doubt necessary to ensure further progress.

Thus the French Revolution could satisfy neither the revolutionaries of its own time nor those of a later age. Begun with the object of replacing a ruling class under royal suzerainty by the sovereignty of the people, it failed in this object and established the supremacy of the bourgeoisie on a firm basis instead. Naturally, this result could satisfy the extremists on neither side. The

representatives of the *ancien régime* thought (and still think) that the rule of the middle classes, so far from being any juster or less selfish than theirs, had merely led to the unrestricted tyranny of capital; the working classes saw themselves cheated of their hopes of equal rights. Both judgments are one-sided and therefore unjust. Plutocracy had already begun under the *ancien régime*, and the Revolution, whatever else it did, admitted wide sections of the community, of whose talents the country had till then made no use, to a share in the government. The bourgeoisie was better educated, more intelligent and abler than the aristocracy which it superseded, though it may have lacked their grace, *esprit* and social tradition. As for the masses, the Revolution gave them greater political liberty, equality before the law, opportunities of educating and bettering themselves, and relief from their most oppressive taxes.

The net result of the Revolution was a whole series of highly important reforms, which people now take so much for granted that they have quite forgotten what a struggle it cost to obtain them, and, instead of being grateful for the things that every class of society, the aristocracy excepted, owes to the Revolution, only have eyes for the things it failed to do.

From the rule of a small privileged caste to universal equality was too big a jump; in practice the Revolution did not get beyond broadening the basis of the ruling class, while universal equality of rights was recognised in theory. That it remained unrealisable in practice was not due entirely to the ill will of the upper classes, but also to that of the lower, and to the human nature common to both. The Revolution soon became a struggle between the liberated bourgeoisie and the lower classes treading on their heels. As the latter got things more and more their own way, it became increasingly clear that their aim was

not equal rights but the destruction of their betters, not equality but the dictatorship of the proletariat. The exploitation of the herd instincts by a few unscrupulous or ambitious leaders led to the Terror, which finally produced such a universal desire for decency and order of some sort or other, that a military dictatorship became inevitable.

The end of the Revolution left the bourgeoisie masters of the field, but it is extremely interesting to observe the way in which their rule was threatened at the outset by the proletariat which is seeking to dethrone them today, to see how the French Revolution marks the beginning of the Bolshevik movement. Another thing it has in common with Bolshevism is the tyranny of the great city over the whole country. The power that had been so completely centralised in the king's hands passed to the capital. It was Paris that made the Revolution, the Terror and the military dictatorship which put an end to the Terror. From the beginning of the Revolution onwards, the man who had Paris had France, the party which had sufficient force at its command to checkmate its opponents in Paris, was master of the whole country. The intellectuals who begat the Revolution were located in the capital and were quite out of touch with the country; like all intellectual movements, Voltaire's rationalism and Rousseau's idealism were products of the town.

Their opponents, the aristocracy and the clergy, had been gravitating towards the court in ever increasing numbers since the days of Louis XIV, and had thus also completely lost touch with the country—except for one or two very Catholic and predominantly Celtic provinces like Brittany and La Vendée and some others; they too had become urban and in so doing cut themselves off from the source of their strength.

France was primarily an agricultural country, industry

being then only in its infancy. The peasants, poor, oppressed and ignorant, had no idea what it was all about; all they knew was that their position was intolerable and that the Revolution promised to improve it. The agricultural population was, and is, non-political and follows anyone who improves—or promises to improve—its material position. This supremacy of the town over the country, which began with the Revolution, became more and more firmly established during the nineteenth century, as the population crowded into the towns in increasing numbers with the gigantic growth of industry. In the age of universal suffrage the political supremacy of the town steadily grew. The masses there got into touch with the prominent intellectuals; the proletariat, swollen to vast dimensions, became political; in a word, the common people began to think. As compared with them the agricultural population—in western Europe, that is—steadily shrank, with the result that the Conservative influence grew weaker. In place of the opposition between the Conservative countryman (living under much the same conditions as he did in feudal times), and the mobile, progressive townsman, we have henceforth the opposition between two sets of townsmen—bourgeoisie versus proletariat—which was heralded by the Revolution and became in a steadily increasing degree the main problem of the age.

This meant a shifting of interest from the political to the economic sphere; for, once the proletariat, with a few exceptions, was in possession of equal political rights, it began to grasp the truth that it would never achieve economic equality along that line; so it turned to Socialism.

Socialism, like all the movements which dominate our times, came into being with the French Revolution and through it. The Revolution is the real starting-point of the new age, the beginning of the great storm that has not

yet abated, the origin of the problems that are still the most burning questions of the hour.

The Revolution split the French nation from top to bottom and the scar is still visible, still constantly making itself felt; there is a great gulf between the spirit of the *ancien régime* and that of the Revolution. To the *ancien régime* (in the spiritual sense, which does not necessarily imply membership of a political party, of course) belong the aristocracy, the army, the Church and part of the bourgeoisie; in these circles people of "revolutionary" mentality are the exception. The aristocracy belongs to the *ancien régime*, because it has never been able to get over the loss of its position and because, having concentrated entirely on the court (herein lies one of the main reasons why things took such a different course in England), it lost both its centre of gravity and its meaning in the Revolution. Even its social supremacy has slipped from it; it has become a small, exclusive but insignificant coterie. The Church has made its peace with the Republic from political and practical motives; but in the nature of the case it cannot help preferring a Catholic monarchy to a form of government which regards it at the best with indifference. The army, or rather the officers as a body, lean towards the *ancien régime* because it has always objected to dependence on parliament and the will of the people, because it is largely recruited from the aristocracy, and because it is a form of the old feudal aristocracy whose military virtues were its title to existence. With these is associated a portion of the bourgeoisie, not inevitably from the very nature of their being, like the above-mentioned classes, but through fear of material losses.

On the other side we have the greater part of the upper and the small bourgeoisie, for whom the liberty that the Revolution brought them is still a living memory; the working classes and proletariat, who regard the Revolution

as a beginning merely, but still the beginning of their revolution; almost all the intellectuals; and finally, the representatives of the formerly oppressed religious minorities—the Protestants and the Jews. Had there been any oppressed races or nationalities in France, they would be on this side too.

The Dreyfus case showed that this cleavage is as much a reality as it was a century ago. The nation at once split up into two parties, and the actual point at issue was soon merely the pretext for the real struggle, which turned on the question whether justice or arbitrary authority, which now appealed to reasons of state since it could no longer invoke divine right, should prevail. It is the perpetual struggle between growth and decay, the future and the past; everything that has the will to growth in it belongs to the party of the Revolution. The real significance of the French Revolution is this, that it welded this party of growth into a spiritual unity. Quite independently of the course of the material revolution with its storms and terrors and achievements, the spiritual revolution created a human unity which stands for what is young and has the future on its side and is the enemy of the old, the worn-out and the obsolete. That is the true revolutionary spirit, which is quite independent of political parties and programmes.

France carried this spirit, and this cleavage, into every country of Europe. The same classes are of a like mind everywhere: the clerical *cum* aristocratic *cum* military spirit and its representatives are the same all the world over and play into each other's hands, just as the partisans of liberty do on their side. But one must not be misled by the names of political parties. The Revolution set up this opposition in place of the old ones: since that time there have been no more dynastic wars and (apart from Russia, which it only reached in 1917) no religious wars or

persecutions; but the struggle between the new pair of assailants was adjourned for more than a century by another, unintentional creation of the Revolution, nationalism.

We have already seen how nationalism came into being. France had to defend the Revolution against the inevitable attacks of foreign nations under the leadership of their princes—inevitable because it was impossible for the two systems to exist peaceably side by side. For the first time a government was waging war for an object that touched the whole nation personally and roused its passionate enthusiasm. In this way the first national army came into being and with it the consciousness of what it means to be a nation was awakened. Thus the Revolution, which had set out to liberate and to unite the whole human race, at the same time created, in nationalism, the greatest obstacle to that union.

The more closely one studies the French Revolution, the more one discovers that all the problems which agitate us today took their start from it, that it was the battlefield on which the struggles that are still raging today began. Everything follows quite naturally from the one fundamental principle—the rejection and abolition of “divine right”, which was symbolised by the execution of the King. By this act, all authority founded on any sort of tradition was challenged for all time; in future, what man had set up man might also destroy: development was recognised as legitimate. From this moment onwards it was impossible to call a halt in the Revolution at any one point, and it remains so, theoretically; it can only be done through violence and forcible suppression, which are contrary to the revolutionary spirit.

The Revolution was among other things a contest of monarchy versus republicanism, starting with the notion of constitutional monarchy and advancing step by step to

the murder of the King. This was to outward view the principal question under dispute, but subsequent experience has shown it to have been the least essential. The really fundamental issue is that of absolute versus parliamentary government; whether an ornamental monarchy is retained with the latter or not is a minor point: the President of the United States is more of an absolute ruler than the King of England. The Revolution ensured the victory of the parliamentary system all over Europe.

As the Revolution progressed it became a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, from which the bourgeoisie emerged victorious. But though the Revolution marks the beginning of bourgeois supremacy, the struggle was not over, and it is now the central issue of domestic politics in Europe. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of the Liberal parties, which represented the bourgeois outlook on life; then followed the rise of Socialism to power and the transference of the centre of gravity to the economic sphere, which in due course, with Communism, took precedence of everything else. The various stages in this struggle correspond exactly with the internal development of the French Revolution itself, from Mirabeau by way of Danton to Robespierre. On that occasion the question, instead of being solved, was side-tracked and shelved by the dictatorship of Napoleon and the diversion of attention to external wars, leaving the bourgeoisie in possession of the field.

The Revolution was a struggle between town and country, in which the town was victorious; and yet this opposition has not vanished either—on the contrary; the development of urban industry has accentuated it. The interests of agriculture and industry are everywhere opposed to each other. The more a country progresses industrially and takes to foreign trade, the more agriculture takes a back seat (England is the most obvious example).

The struggle is by no means over yet. The progress of urban development may appear irresistible in Europe, but this phenomenon is confined to Europe. In Russia, when all is said and done, the immense numerical preponderance of the agricultural population will settle the future destiny of the country; in the United States, where industrial development has been carried to its highest pitch, agriculture has also been strengthening its position, and it is precisely there that the conviction is growing that the aim must be to reverse the process of development which is rapidly making the towns unfit to live in. This problem is, of course, closely bound up with those of politics and culture.

We saw that both nationalism and super-nationalism or Europeanism are equally the offspring of the French Revolution. The development was from Europeanism to nationalism. Imposed on the Revolution by force of circumstances both internal and external, it, too, had its parallels in Europe. At the end of the eighteenth century nationalism was still unknown, in the nineteenth it became the decisive factor in foreign policy and the cause of all wars. It is only since the end of the world war that the idea of a super-national commonwealth of peoples has raised its head again. The struggle continues.

The Revolution was a struggle between the two components of the human spirit, intellect and emotion, the Voltairean ideal and the ideal of Rousseau. It may be said to have begun in the spirit of Voltaire, with the desire for rational reform, and to have drifted more and more into the Rousseauian waters of emotionalism, in both the good and bad senses of the word. Another way of putting it would be, that liberty is rational, equality irrational and romantic, which throws a great deal of light on English history (liberty) as opposed to French. The more stress is laid on the immediate establishment of equality, which can only be achieved by pulling down everything that in

any way rises above the average, the more impossible does liberty become. Herein lie the seeds of the internecine strife between the political ideals of Liberalism and Socialism, which appears in its extremest form as anarchism versus Communist dictatorship.

The circle which begins with the desire to get rid of rigid authority in the interests of liberty, ends in authority still more rigid, though it may have passed into other hands. In the struggle of the "revolutionary" spirit against "tyranny", the ultra-revolutionaries are always closely akin in spirit to the ultra-reactionaries.

Translated into the sphere of art, the Revolution was a struggle between Classicism, which has affinities with rationalism, and Romanticism, which is emotional. The Revolution begins with Classicism as a reaction against the "frivolous" aristocratic art of the eighteenth century. Romanticism, which emanates from Rousseau, was checked in its development by the Classicism which reached its height in the Napoleonic era, and only triumphed later. It began with Rousseau and the *Sturm und Drang* period, but then suffered an eclipse.

Thus, from whatever angle one views the Revolution, its significance always remains the same. In the violence of that upheaval everything came toppling down and was thrown into the melting-pot. In every department it marks the beginning of the modern era, the point at which the problems which still occupy us today first make their appearance. It is impossible either to regret or to endorse the Revolution; one can only say that through it France dealt the old order its death-blow and cleared the way for the new all over Europe.

CHAPTER IX

“HIMSELF”

WHEN the Terror was succeeded by the Directory, which led to the perpetual consulship of Napoleon and finally to the Empire, France was in a state of chaos. It is part of the natural course of events that revolutions should end in dictatorships and that the dictatorships should appear reactionary, since their business is to restore order. The stage seemed set for a return to the governmental principles of the *ancien régime*, such as the Bourbons actually attempted later on; but Napoleon saw the hopelessness of such an attempt. The *ancien régime* was as dead as the Revolution; something entirely new had to be created, and, as so often, the latest thing was the oldest of all and hence the most completely forgotten. Napoleon revived the Roman idea. He was in reality a second Cæsar, planning and carrying out a second conquest of Gaul by the Latin spirit—not a Frenchman at all but a Roman.

The absolute monarchy which Louis XIV created was shattered, the feudal aristocracy exiled or wiped out, the Church powerless. All the forces which had dominated and moulded France from the early Middle Ages onwards had disappeared; only the foundation of the building, the spirit of Latin antiquity, remained, and on this Napoleon raised the stately edifice of the Empire, in the Roman imperial style. He was faced with the superhuman task of rebuilding the shattered state from the inside and leading

it to victory in war; for in the eyes of the other powers he was the child and the executor of the Revolution, the enemy of the divinely appointed system of government. To achieve order at home he had to win victories abroad, and was compelled to carry the spirit of the Revolution beyond the borders that he might put an end to the Revolution inside them: he had to be at once the executor and the liquidator of the Revolution. He was equal to this task, superhuman as it was. He was equal to it, because he brought to his decisions and actions not merely the most acute intelligence but also the most profound intuition; he was a genius because he followed the dictates of the unconscious. He was the great example of "superstition", trusting blindly to his star in situations where no amount of intelligence could have availed him. He had that blind faith in his own divine vocation which characterises all the people who have had a decisive influence on the destiny of the human race; but the God in whom he trusted was himself. His guiding stars were the three greatest rulers of history—Alexander, Cæsar and Charlemagne. He conceived it as his mission to found a great empire like them, and, unlike them, to make it last. Wars and conquests were to him, as to his models, means to an end; it was his tragedy and his fault that the means became an end in themselves, so that no attainable object could satisfy his lust for glory. Napoleon did not labour for France: France and the French were to him merely means to an end. He made a distinction between "France" and the "great French Empire"; his object was not to enlarge France but—in the first years of his reign—to renew the empire of Charlemagne, and after he had conquered Italy and become Protector of the Confederation of the Rhine, he might have succeeded in it. He had also renewed relations with the Vatican at an early stage, concluded the Concordat and recognised the Catholic Church as "the

religion of the majority of Frenchmen”, even if he would not go to the whole length of its demands and make it the state religion. He submitted to the will of the Pope and consented to be crowned by him, but snatched the crown from his hands and put it on his own head—Rome had to recognise him, but he would not be dependent on Rome. He did his best to restore all the pillars of stability in France, but in the form which suited him—the monarchy, but not the old one; the Church, but in dependence on himself; the aristocracy, but a military aristocracy of his own creation.

That great repository of law, the *Code Napoléon*, which served as the model for most others and is still in force in France, was his work; so was the existing educational system, which is firmly rooted in the classics and definitely sets up the Latin genius to preside over the education of the nation. He created the Banque de France, thereby stabilising the national finances, and the Legion of Honour—the latter one of the mainstays of his system; for he grasped the important part played in affairs by vanity and love of glory, no doubt because he was himself chock-full of both.

Nobody can say how far he consciously implanted and fostered the lust for *gloire* in the French people in order to make them swallow his enormous demands in men and material more readily, and how far he regarded this *gloire* as an end and ideal in itself. He was a real Cæsar, but he also acted the part—and took lessons in it from Talma, the tragedian. He set out to exploit human vanity for his purposes, but was himself subject to it too. Who shall say, for instance, how far the gorgeous pageant of his coronation, which struck many eye-witnesses—Talleyrand, for example—as a grotesque farce, was intended to impress the world and how far it really gratified Napoleon himself? Napoleon is a Cæsar with something of the *parvenu*

about him, a genius with childish weaknesses. It was a weakness to kick Josephine out, whom he really loved, in order to espouse a princess of the Imperial house, the daughter of a *real* Emperor—only to be convinced that his “luck” had left him with Josephine. His excessive ambition, which could tolerate the existence of no power on earth besides himself, may also be termed a weakness.

What a tragedy that this great European destroyed Europe instead of creating it, because it was not enough for him; that he was not content to be Charlemagne but must needs be Alexander too !

“I will make one nation of all the nations,” he said to Fouché, shortly before he started on his Russian campaign. But instead of bringing freedom and peace to the nations he conquered he used them as gold-mines and cannon-fodder; he turned them into nationalists, when he might have made Europeans of them. Undoubtedly, the idea of creating a united, happy empire was in his mind all the time; but the moment for the reign of unity and peace to begin was put off and off, because that empire never seemed large enough.

The rock on which Napoleon’s neo-Carolingian Empire split was his desire to extend it beyond the borders of Europe. Russia and, above all, England were fatal to it. General Bonaparte already recognised England as the arch-enemy, and tried to hit her in her most vulnerable spot; like Alexander, he wanted India. For that purpose it was necessary to conquer Egypt and Syria and be master of Constantinople. Possibly—one cannot be certain after the event—England might have tolerated, or been forced to accept, a great Continental empire; but she was bound to fight to her last man against an empire that was to be founded on her own ruins. And she won.

It is impossible to do justice to Napoleon if one insists on regarding him merely as the Emperor of the French,

an ambitious and brilliant commander who tried to incorporate the whole world in his country and thereby roused the world's fury against France. His last will and testament is characteristic; in it he writes: *je désire que mes cendres reposent sur les bords de la Seine, au milieu de ce peuple français que j'ai tant aimé.* He speaks of the French as if they were foreigners.

No doubt they were nearer to his heart than any other nation, but it never occurred to him to identify himself with them. He was a turning-point in the destiny of France as of all other countries, and on no nation did he inflict more suffering than on the French; on the other hand, no other nation has so much to thank him for. He found a ruin and left a state whose main pillars—educational, cultural and legal—are still standing. He re-created a homogeneous nation where there was nothing left but wreckage. His work inside France has survived him and will not pass away. Perhaps that makes up for the irreparable losses in which he involved her people—the millions of dead, cripples, widows and orphans; but it is certainly not the cause of the Napoleonic legend. His contemporaries were completely under the spell of his superhuman personality; to them he was a God or the Devil incarnate, not a human being whose qualities and defects, successes and mistakes can be calmly weighed up and judged. Even today his is still a name to be conjured with. We are still too near this towering figure for it to seem anything but absurd and presumptuous to criticise his achievements and ideas. Light and shade are so mixed up that it is impossible to dole out a word of praise here and a criticism there, like a pedantic schoolmaster. One can only accept him as a part of Fate, as a dæmonic personality and as a tragic figure. He is a tragic figure because he not merely failed to reach his objective but was instrumental in bringing about its exact

opposite. Instead of his founding a dynasty, his only son died a prisoner of the Habsburgs; he left France weakened in power and territory; England became a great world power through him; and, most tragic of all, instead of creating a united Europe he awakened national self-consciousness everywhere, and that led to nationalism, which was destined to split Europe asunder for another century.

His political testament contains the following words : " War is an anachronism. Anyone who still wants it in Europe wants civil war "; but the man who realised this and left this message of peace behind him was the very man whose whole life had been war and who had made that message a dead letter for a hundred years. Before his time there were quarrels between dynasties; enmity between nations first appears after the Napoleonic wars, which became wars of liberation for the European peoples. It was he who put the idea of self-determination, of political unity for people of the same race or language, into their heads, and swept away the last remnants of a European culture to make room for national cultures. He, the great European, is the begetter of all nationalistic ambition, the creator of the present mosaic-like map of Europe. He is the motive-force which created a united Germany and a united Italy; but he is also the force which dismembered this Germany again and destroyed the Habsburg monarchy, the cause of all those insoluble disputes about frontiers which spring from the principle of nationality, the father of everything that stands in the way of European unity.

By his efforts everything he had hoped to prevent happened, everything he had hoped to do came to nothing. Even now, after his death, he remains the idol, not of the Europeanly minded, but of the militarists and " strong men " in all countries who want to be German or Polish or

Italian Napoleons, because they can see nothing in the man whose ultimate aim was a united humanity, beyond a soldier, out for fame and loot for himself and France. It is neither as the wise organiser of the French state nor as the far-sighted empire-builder nor even—so far as the great majority of people are concerned—as the *miles gloriosus* of the militarists that Napoleon lives in legend.

He has already become a myth, a demi-god, in a way no other figure of historical times has done. Neither Goethe nor Frederick the Great among the Germans, neither Shakespeare nor Nelson in England, neither Louis XIV nor any other Frenchman, is the object of such almost religious veneration. He belongs to the small company of the dæmonic personalities of history, who appear mysterious and superhuman to their contemporaries and to posterity, and stimulate their craving to worship. His position is not comparable to that of other great rulers or commanders at all; he is with the prophets and founders of religions—Moses, Mahomet, Christ, Gautama Buddha, and of these perhaps most of all with Mahomet, who was, like him, also a man of war. For the multitude Napoleon has become the god of war and renown.

Even his defeat only enhanced his glory and nothing has done more to exalt him above mankind than his tragic end. The sense of justice is still outraged, as it was in his lifetime, by the mean little pin-pricks to which the fallen Titan was subjected. Set against the pettiness of his gaolers, his figure gained enormously in stature. It is interesting to consider how differently the story would have ended if Napoleon had carried out his first plan after his final defeat; his original idea, which was quite a feasible one, was to escape to America and live there in complete retirement as a farmer. In that way the tragedy would have turned into a bourgeois drama. As it was, he missed his chance of escape and resolved to throw himself on the

mercy of England. Instead of finding a refuge there, as he hoped, he was banished to St. Helena and disappeared from the ranks of the living. While he was slowly approaching his end out there, in an unhealthy climate, shamefully treated, denied the title of Emperor, his life made as uncomfortable as possible out of petty spite, his figure grew and grew in the popular imagination. The blood and terror and devastation of his reign, his defeats and waverings were forgotten; all that people remembered was his tremendous personality.

A thick darkness settled over France and all Europe. The Bourbons, who had "learnt nothing and forgotten nothing" could please nobody. Everything became petty, half-baked, meaningless; the nation was weary and discouraged. Elsewhere, too, the intoxication of liberty was followed by the disenchantment of reaction, and heroism gave place to the prose of everyday life. The authorities anxiously watched for the smallest stirring of the spirit of liberty and stamped it out; they would have liked best of all to restore the Middle Ages. The spirit of Metternich and the police reigned supreme.

In 1821 Napoleon died in exile; his tombstone remained blank because "Napoleon" was not allowed to be carved on it in accordance with the dead man's orders, the English governor insisting on "Napoleon Bonaparte". Twenty years later, when his mortal remains were removed to France, to find their last and worthy resting place in the Invalides, Napoleon was already the national hero of France.

Forgotten were the sufferings, the defeats, the oppression: Napoleon had become, for France, the symbol of warlike renown and supreme power—a symbol that was once more to land the nation in disaster. Nobody thought any more about the great European, few about the restorer of public order; to the French Napoleon was the epi-

tome of their *gloire*, to the rest of the world the greatest soldier of modern times, and to everybody the embodiment of the war-spirit which dominated Europe from that time onwards.

CHAPTER X

BOURGEOIS AND ROMANTIC

AFTER the mighty tragedy of Napoleon, the drabness of everyday life; a period with no great line, no ideals, no clearly defined aims, no illusions. Out of the débris of his creation, the remains of the Revolution and recollections of the *ancien régime*, people tried to fashion something workable, but they never succeeded in fusing these various elements into a unity. The attempt was made over and over again, each time in a different way; but it always failed, and French history from now on to the middle of the nineteenth century is the record of these failures. Yet even in this period the destiny of Europe was linked to that of France, its development determined by the course of events there; so that the latter are, in spite of everything, important.

Louis XVIII, who was to bring back the past, was a man of compromise—too intelligent to embark on the hopeless enterprise of restoring absolute monarchy, but on the other hand too convinced a legitimist to recognise the sovereignty of the people. So he “granted” a constitution. He was much too absolute for the democrats or republicans and much too republican for the royalists. In any case he was old and tired, and from the very beginning the driving-force behind the throne was his die-hard brother, the Comte d’Artois, who succeeded him in a few years as Charles X.

Under him, everything that the Revolution had put down raised its head again. The clergy, the aristocracy and divine right of kings came into their own once more. The power of the Jesuits grew, and with it their unpopularity; for they were regarded, rightly or wrongly, as responsible for the reaction. The King was entirely in the hands of the priests and of his still more clerical minister, Polignac, who believed, or at any rate declared, that his policy was inspired by the Virgin Mary. Deaf to all suggestions or warnings from any other quarter, Charles under-rated the strength of the opposition; and when the Chamber refused to support Polignac, he dissolved it. The ensuing elections merely strengthened the opposition; whereupon he declared them invalid, altered the electoral law of the country by Order in Council, restricting the franchise to 25,000 persons, comprising the most Conservative section of the upper classes, and suspended the freedom of the Press.

That evening the tricolor was once more hoisted in Paris, as journalists, students, workmen and bourgeois rose in rebellion. By next evening the flag of the Revolution was flying over the Hotel de Ville; a few days later Charles X had abdicated and fled to England, and Louis-Philippe of Orleans was "King of the French".

The July Revolution has rightly been called a semi-revolution; for it resulted in the triumph of the *juste-milieu*. Louis-Philippe, the bourgeois king, the *Roi-parapluie*, was another Louis XVIII, so afraid of extremes of every kind that he ended by satisfying no party. The Left was opposed to him from the beginning. In addition to the newly formed Socialist party, he had the out-and-out republicans against him, and these were joined by a rapidly growing Bonapartist party, which was clever enough to put universal suffrage and socialistic legislation into its programme. The legitimists—i.e. the aristocracy

and a large proportion of the clergy—were equally, if not more, hostile to him : in their eyes this Comte de Chambord remained a traitor and a usurper—a traitor to the Bourbons, as the house of Orleans had already shown itself in 1789. His only supporters were the bourgeoisie; hence this is *par excellence* the epoch of bourgeois supremacy. It is the great middle-class age, the age of Monsieur Prud'homme, the Biedermeier period, provincial, complacent and narrow-minded, the age of the rentier and of the motto *Enrichissez-vous*. Its peace was disturbed by revolutionary attempts from two quarters—the Labour Party, under its Socialist leaders, and Louis Napoleon. Here was the workshop in which the instruments of destiny were being forged. Thiers, the faithful henchman of the King, himself did more than anybody else to foster the growth of the Napoleonic legend, by writing his great history, in which he glorified the Emperor. The Napoleonic Arc de Triomphe was completed and dedicated, and the Emperor's remains laid to rest with all possible pomp and circumstance beneath the dome of the Invalides. Thus was the most dangerous enemy nourished within the gate. Meanwhile, the government came more and more to represent the class interests of the rich bourgeoisie, and refused to grant any extension whatever of the franchise, which was then confined to 200,000 citizens. Once more this led to revolutionary outbreaks and to the abdication of the King, who wished to avoid bloodshed. On February 25, 1848, the Second Republic was proclaimed. This was the signal for a mighty upheaval which shook the whole Continent. The Revolution of 1848 bulks larger in the history of the rest of Europe than of France. In Vienna Metternich, the fitting symbol of reactionary Europe, fell; the King of Prussia was forced to grant a constitution; Hungary, Bohemia, Poland and Italy were in an uproar. The Revolution was the signal for all who felt themselves

oppressed to make a bid for freedom, whether their object was political liberty or national unity. All of them looked to revolutionary France as their leader and guide in the struggle for liberty. Hence the period, though one of violent dissensions and alternating extremes for France itself, is nevertheless of great importance for the understanding of France's position in Europe. The struggle for constitutional, parliamentary government on the basis of universal suffrage was the omnipresent issue. It could only end when all the nations of Europe had reached about the same level of democratic freedom; for in this Europe which grows smaller every day, any attempt to withhold from a nation what its neighbours have already acquired is doomed to failure.

The Second Republic gave France its longed-for universal suffrage, together with freedom of the Press and the right of assembly; but these reforms were not enough for the Socialist party. It had grasped the truth that economic equality does not automatically follow upon political equality, and had made the urban proletariat class-conscious; now it claimed the "right to work". The first Ministry of Labour was set up; the working day was reduced to ten hours, public works were undertaken to provide occupation for the unemployed; but these measures proved insufficient.

The National Workshops became headquarters of social-revolutionary propaganda, so the government closed them; there were hunger-riots and heavy fighting in the streets; and by the time order was restored the Republic was already thoroughly unpopular. Paris elected Prince Louis Napoleon as its representative. A few months later he was elected President of the Republic. The Right looked upon him as an obedient tool; the Left, on the strength of his writings, as a Socialist; and his name was enough for the masses. That day marks the end of an epoch.

The history of the arts in this period stands in the most violent contrast to its political history. Here there is a complete break with the eighteenth century. In those days writers were the intellectual leaders of the nation. It was they who demanded the reforms, they who were the motive force behind politics : their influence was enormous. The Revolution discredited them, intellectuals and artists being regarded with suspicion by both sides. The supporters of the old régime held them responsible for the catastrophe; on the other hand, they were not sufficiently radical to please the Jacobins, who looked upon " art " as a relic of class rule. To prove their worth, art and literature turned traitors to their own nature, becoming the servants of power and mouthpieces of the prescribed morality. Under Napoleon they were set to the task of glorifying his name : hence the complete negligibleness of the art and literature of the period. With the fall of Napoleon the position changed; but the bourgeois era which now dawned cared nothing for intellectual values. It was prosaic and practical and concerned only with making money, while the arts took up an attitude of violent opposition to the age. Thus arose the Romantic movement.

There is a queer duality about this movement; it has two aspects, a revolutionary and a reactionary. It was revolutionary in so far as it loathed the prevailing bourgeois spirit with all its soul, and set out to dissociate itself from it in every possible way, to deride and provoke it. Indeed, the notion of the Bourgeois, the petty, narrow-minded, hypocritical, money-grubbing tradesman, is the invention of the Romantics, who set up the ideal of the Bohemian, the idealistic, unconventional, poor but free artist in opposition to it. Thus there came about that separation of art and life, which has done such infinite harm to art and degraded it to a position of complete

insignificance. And yet it is impossible to lay the blame on either side. Being what it was, this society inevitably rejected intellectual values, and was, for its part, quite incapable of fostering their growth. The loud, unruly behaviour of the artists and their works repelled it and made it feel uncomfortable.

This revolutionary spirit was at the same time reactionary, in so much as it was entirely without illusions. The Romantics looked to the past for salvation, not to a future which their labours were to build up, as the great men of the eighteenth century had done. From the present which they hated, they fled for refuge to whatever seemed most remote from it—to the Middle Ages, the East, the fairy-tale. They enthused over distant times and places, over knights and castles and Gothic cathedrals, Italy and Spain, the Rhine and the Highlands of Scotland. They loved everything super-sensual—Catholic mysticism, the lore of magic and witchcraft, stories of ghosts and apparitions. Everything that was most violently contrary to bourgeois morality—tramps and thieves and prostitutes—they extolled; incest was one of their favourite themes. They loved the heroic, the cruel, the horrible, the terrifying—in a word, the Satanic.

In France the Romantic movement represented the first great reaction since Gothic times against the Latin spirit in the field of the arts. Passing over the bourgeois state, the Empire, and the absolute monarchy, it went straight back to feudalism, to the Gothic Middle Ages; its masterpiece bears the title of *Notre Dame de Paris*. It was to this long-vanished age of mystical Christianity and chivalric splendour that the Romantics tried to hitch their waggon. But it was an age which France had long left behind, and nothing could bring it back to life.

In this anti-Latin reaction, this fight against Classicism, the French spirit was fighting against its own creation, and

had to seek support abroad. France had originally come into existence through a synthesis of the Teutonic, the Celtic and the Latin spirits, but the Latin had gradually ousted the others; what remained of Teutonic or Celtic was too weak to do anything without external help. The Romantic movement in France meant a re-awakening of the Teutonic or Northern and the Celtic elements in the French composition under the stimulus of kindred elements from outside : thus, for the first time since the days of Louis XIV, France was not the leader in Europe but the led.

This is what makes the period so important, especially in view of the present situation; it is a proof that France and Europe can and must act on each other, thus preventing the rise of an exclusively Latin, classical and rationalistic culture, alien and antagonistic to central and northern Europe. France had been playing the part of the giver since Louis XIV's day; now it was her turn to receive.

It was England, in the first instance, that imposed its influence on France and the rest of Europe. By 1814 Scott had already begun his series of historical novels, almost all taken from the Middle Ages, which were received with an enthusiasm that seems incredible today. It was from Scotland and its ancestral Celtic people that the Middle Ages started on their triumphal career. They were (and are) still a living reality there. The landscape is mountainous and cloudy, at once rugged and dreamy; grim castles and fortresses are reflected in black lakes and streams; lonely moors stretch away into infinity almost enveloped in the low-hanging clouds. The people are simple and patriarchal, tenacious of their strange ancestral dress, their wild dances and the melancholy music of their bagpipes. It is the land of Macbeth, Ossian and the Stuarts. This is the spirit that gave birth to Scott's novels, *Waverley*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *Rob Roy* and the

rest; with its knights and castles, its beautiful maidens and romantic robber-barons it conquered France, as it did all Europe, and dominated them for a quarter of a century. It is illuminating to find writers everywhere following this example and turning to their own countries' past, discovering their own Middle Ages. But for France those Middle Ages were Frankish, that is to say, Teutonic. This explains how German Romanticism also came to influence France. The cult of the fairy-tale, which is characteristic of the Romantic period, came from Germany; Tieck and Novalis, but above all Hoffman, "ghost" Hoffman, became the vogue. The super-sensual, mystical, fairy-tale side of the Romantics was of Germanic origin.

The second great Englishman who revolutionised European literature was Byron. It was not merely his poetry that did it but, most of all, his fascinating personality. Young, handsome, rich, of ancient lineage, the hero of countless love-affairs, exiled from his country and encircled by wild rumours—his life, right up to his death in the cause of Greek freedom, was a perfect romantic epic. Every young man imitated him, every tragic hero had a touch of him. With his *Weltschmerz*, his unhappy love, his cynicism and satanism, he was the perfect living anti-thesis of the hated bourgeois. Everything that the poets had dreamed of they found combined in Byron; he was the poet's ideal made flesh.

All these influences went to the making of the French Romantic movement. It had been foreshadowed by Rousseau long before, but after that events had kept it back over a long period. The outburst, when it came, was tremendously violent; but then, nowhere else was there so strong a resistance to be overcome. Romanticism comes naturally to the Celtic and Teutonic peoples, while the classical spirit is foreign to them; in France the opposite was the case.

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loneliness, his terror of death and his despair. In its positive aspect it stands for becoming as opposed to being, movement as opposed to rest, growth as opposed to fixity. That is why it has an affinity with the period of growth in the individual, with childhood and adolescence; and why Romantic art and the romantic outlook have always had youth on their side. And therefore, in spite of all apparently reactionary tendencies, the Romantic movement may be said to have put new life into the withered branches of the human soul and made them bear fruit once more.

Both the qualities and the defects of the Romantics are those of youth—enthusiasm and energy on the one hand, bombast and pose on the other. As a part of their revolt against order in general, they attempted in every department of art to get clear of all regulations and barriers. A characteristic feature of the movement is the fusion of the different arts. Romanticism is unarchitectonic, because the strict rules which are essential to architecture are contrary to its spirit. If painting, poetry and music seem to obey architectural rules in the classical period, the reverse holds good of the Romantic, in which music, the most emotional of the arts, takes first place. It is the age of music and colour; its music is “colourful”, its painting musical and literary, its poetry influenced by music and painting, its architecture picturesque. Everything is in a state of flux. Victor Hugo’s most enthusiastic adherents (who secured the success of his *Hernani*) were young painters, while it was the poets who encouraged the painters.

Along with this interchange among the arts a similar interchange took place between the nations. It is the great age of translations, in which the European nations got to know each other and the East, while new things came from the East to stimulate the imagination. As a result, the Romantic period achieved greatness in every sphere of

What—if one tries to get below national peculiarities or historical character—is the essential nature of Romanticism? It is an attitude to life, which is not confined to the epoch known to history as the Romantic period, but is ranged against the “classical” attitude in every age. Both are always there, at odds with one another; but one or the other sets its seal on every period.

Romanticism is the cult of the ego, which feels itself isolated and unique and accepts this fate with patience, despair or irony as the case may be; it is thus the negation and rejection of civic sense and of order, whether social, political, or universal. It longs to believe but does not return to the faith; for the believer is a man of order, and therefore classical. When the Church was still supreme, people left fundamental problems to it, and the metaphysical craving found no place in their thoughts. In this respect Catholicism and rationalism are not so far apart: the one takes charge of these problems, the other dismisses them; both accordingly keep them out of life, thus enabling it to achieve some sort of order. The Romantic feels that he must decide them for himself, that nobody can take them off his shoulders; hence his perpetual probing, his agonies of terror and longing, his craving for sin, in which he does not believe, and for superhuman virtue, which is denied to him. Because he feels his human ego as something cut off from other human beings, he pours out his affections over “Nature,” discovers the beauty of scenery, of sky and earth, and, while denying natural causation, seeks a supernatural. What is near and attainable seems foreign to him; that is why he longs for everything remote in time and place. It is only with the past, or the remote future, never with the present, that he feels, or will admit, kinship; nothing attracts him that is not utterly out of tune with the age and his contemporaries. Romanticism gives voice to man’s eternal

loneliness, his terror of death and his despair. In its positive aspect it stands for becoming as opposed to being, movement as opposed to rest, growth as opposed to fixity. That is why it has an affinity with the period of growth in the individual, with childhood and adolescence; and why Romantic art and the romantic outlook have always had youth on their side. And therefore, in spite of all apparently reactionary tendencies, the Romantic movement may be said to have put new life into the withered branches of the human soul and made them bear fruit once more.

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art—apart from architecture, where it was the first age to copy the past without a single idea of its own, producing nothing beyond Gothic castles and utterly uninspired apartment-houses, except in so far as it remained heavily classicist. Music, on the other hand, went from triumph to triumph. Weber thrilled all Germany with his *Freischütz*, Meyerbeer Germany and France, Chopin the whole of Europe. Auber's *La Muette de Portici* was the signal for the revolt of the Belgians against Dutch rule. At the head of the French dramatists and novelists stood Victor Hugo, the central figure of the whole Romantic movement. Hugo is the representative figure of French romanticism, brilliant, inexhaustible, enthusiastic, but also rhetorical, bombastic and smelling of the lamp. He remained a local deity, his influence confined to France, whereas the far inferior Dumas *père* enchanted the whole of Europe. The reason is not far to seek. All genuine romanticism, genuine emotional art, genuine youth is spontaneous; when it becomes self-conscious it is intolerable. But Victor Hugo and the French Romantics are self-conscious. People in France were undoubtedly possessed by a craving for romantic feeling, which caused them to throw themselves enthusiastically into the arms of anything foreign in which it was to be found; but the feeling itself was denied to the French. They were too deeply imbued with the classical spirit and rationalism on one side and the spirit of the Church on the other; in a word, they were far too grown-up to be naïve. Dumas is the exception, and that is undoubtedly to be ascribed to his negro blood.

In the domain of painting, France, represented by Delacroix, Géricault and the rest of them, produced excellent work, but here, too, she only regained her leadership of Europe after the decline of the Romantic impulse, when Balzac presided over her literature, Courbet and the School

of Fontainebleau over her painting. These movements are not to be sharply distinguished from the Romantic movement in time; but in spirit they are its successors and antagonists. All the movements which were to fill the coming epoch were, of course, already growing up—Socialism in politics, the mighty upheavals caused by technical progress, Naturalism in art, etc. etc.; but the mark of the period itself was the antagonism between the bourgeois and the revolutionary spirit in politics, and between Philistinism and revolution (here called romanticism) in art.

A new factor made its appearance in the sharp division of intellectual and artistic from social life, which proved fatal to both parties. It became clear that the middle classes had no use for intellectual values; they either rejected them or tried to turn them to "practical" uses. Instead of enjoying things, they wanted to "understand" them, and this understanding was to serve the purpose of raising the level of their "culture". So they invented the museum, the encyclopædia and the daily newspaper.

The great Romantic storm went on raging over Europe, but the middle classes remained unmoved and untouched by it. They spent the period in securing their political supremacy against the Right, in which they were successful in France, thus enabling other countries to achieve the same success in due course; and against the Left, where their success was merely temporary. In any case, their ideal of peace and quiet proved an idle dream; for new clouds were already gathering on the horizon.

CHAPTER XI

CANCAN

NOTHING in the history of the nineteenth century is more striking than the rapidity with which public opinion swings from one extreme to the other. The earthquake of 1789 had not yet spent its force, and made any permanent equilibrium impossible as long as the problems it had raised remained unsolved. Nothing else can explain the phenomenon of Napoleon III. Hardly thirty years had passed since his great ancestor went into exile, leaving a defeated and dismembered nation behind him, when the same nation, blinded by the prestige of a name, betook itself to his nephew.

He had little to recommend him beyond his name, but that sufficed to make him ruler of France and arbiter of Europe. He must have been a weak and undecided character, to judge by his actions; but his supporters took him for a great Emperor and his enemies for a scoundrel of diabolical ability. At the beginning of his career he showed great skill in exploiting the general discontent and disillusionment. The Chamber, by its reactionary temper, had alienated the Left, especially the Socialists, without winning the good graces of the anti-republican Right. In virtue of certain of his writings Napoleon had a reputation as a Socialist; on the other hand the Bonapartist party, which was still strong, naturally regarded him as a deliverer. Moreover, no other figure in this bourgeois age lent itself so well to the craving, always latent in the

minds of the masses, for a hero to worship. Louis Napoleon's popularity thus rested on two foundations—his name and the tradition bound up with it, and his Socialistic leanings. The fact that these two things were mutually exclusive and incompatible proved his undoing, as it was bound to do.

The Chamber had restricted the franchise once more, recalled the Jesuits and severely muzzled the Press. After the success of the *coup d'état*, Napoleon appeared in the guise of a liberator to begin with. He curtailed the powers of parliament, granted the workers the right to strike and to combine, and carried out agrarian reforms by which the peasants profited. The nation was pleased with him; but the mighty shade of his uncle would not let him rest. *L'empire, c'est la paix*, ran his first proclamation; but it was not long before the country was involved in wars abroad. To do him justice, it must be admitted that Napoleon's foreign policy was in many respects idealistic and unselfish. The leading motives behind it were thirst for fame and the desire to support ambitions which he believed to have right on their side. Thus he went to war with Austria for the sake of Italian independence, and supported Prussia against the Habsburgs, because he was convinced of the justice of the demand for national self-determination. Partly voluntarily, partly against his will, he laid the foundations of a united Italy and a united German Empire. But he did everything by halves: appalled at the implications of his policy, he left his allies in the lurch, with the result that distrust of him grew daily stronger and more widespread, till he came to be regarded as the great disturber of the peace of Europe, on whose apparently incalculable moods everything hung as by a thread.

His colonial wars in Syria, Cochin-China and China were more successful, till the Mexican venture led to a

catastrophe in this department too. In spite of the rather more liberal policy he attempted to adopt after years of absolute government (his socialistic promises had quickly been forgotten), the elections of '63, following on the Mexican expedition, resulted in a huge accession of strength to the opposition. Napoleon took the Prussian's part against the Austrians in '64, himself smoothing the way for the alliance of Prussia and Italy against Austria; but when the war of '66 ended in the victory of the Prussians and the tightening of the bonds between the southern states and the North German Confederation, he suddenly realised the danger that threatened his supremacy. Yet even now he still hesitated between threats of war and overtures of friendship. War was staved off for a few years more, but it became clear that it could only be a matter of time. German unity was already an accomplished fact in all but name, but Napoleon was not prepared to recognise it.

The Exhibition of '67 gave the Second Empire one more chance to appear before the world in all its glory. Napoleon was able to welcome the Czar and the Sultan, the rulers of Austria and of Prussia to his capital; but it was a last flutter. The elections of '69 resulted in a victory for the opposition, which henceforth had a majority. Thereupon Napoleon resolved to return to parliamentary government; but it was too late. The days of his rule were numbered, death and disaster were knocking on the door.

Napoleon III's reign coincides with a period of progress and growing wealth all over the Continent. The same causes led to the same effects everywhere. Stupendous technical advances changed the face of Europe. Wherever one turned, industry was on the increase (and with it Socialism), commerce spreading; railways and steamships conquered distance, goods-traffic went up by leaps and

bounds, while improved means of communication jumbled up nationals of every country together. The daily press grew to vast dimensions, and every inhabitant of a civilised country was kept constantly informed of everything that was going on in other countries.

France was the leading country of Europe at this time, and therefore the most representative of the period. It was there that those symptoms first appeared which the whole of Europe was exhibiting a little later.

Outwardly, everything was tremendously on the up-grade—commerce and industry flourishing; business of every sort getting steadily bigger; new buildings, new works, new enterprises everywhere; old fortunes growing, new ones being made; life and movement everywhere. The word “progress” was on everybody’s lips, and everybody believed in it. Successful campaigns added to the country’s fame, and new colonies opened up undreamed-of possibilities. The France of Napoleon III presents precisely the same spectacle as the Germany of William II; it is an age of rising wealth, increasing luxury, blind materialism, enormous cocksureness and vanity. The growth of prosperity is counterbalanced by spiritual decline, enterprise by speculation, the luxurious life of Society by its rapid decay. The narrow but solid bourgeoisie of Louis-Philippe’s day disappears from the scene. It continued to exist in the “provinces”, i.e. throughout the whole length and breadth of the country, about which so little was heard or known; but in Paris a new society grew up, and nothing else counted compared with Paris.

Paris was the capital of Europe in this epoch; Parisian society was the pattern of all European society, as the court of Versailles had once been of all courts, but it had ceased to be French and had become the first cosmopolitan society. The same trend in every country—love of pleasure,

self-indulgence, luxury, newly acquired wealth—created a social class which made Paris its centre. Paris became the capital of pleasure, the universal recreation-ground, the Mecca of all who have money to burn and want to burn it agreeably. Napoleon III did a lot for Paris. Magnificent buildings sprang up, splendid new thoroughfares were built (amid an orgy of speculation in real estate), the first “grand hotels” and the first big stores in Europe were launched; the tempo of city life became faster and more hectic. Fashions became eccentric; the crinoline came in, and with it the notion of the *demi-monde*, baptised after a play of Dumas’. The age of the *cocotte* and the adventurer began.

The sovereign was an adventurer; his beautiful Spanish wife had spent her youth in cosmopolitan hotels and *pensions*, and her court was the goal of adventurers and ladies of not quite spotless reputation from every country. The example was quickly followed. It became old-fashioned and absurd to ask about people’s origin or reputation; if He had money and She was beautiful or smart, Society accepted them; till this Society, from which the “old-fashioned” people had withdrawn, ended by consisting entirely of more or less exotic foreigners and only too broad-minded natives, who thought of nothing in this world but enjoying themselves.

It is no mere coincidence that the style of the period is a revival of Rococo; for history was repeating itself. Once more a society was on its deathbed, as in the *fête-galante* period; only this society was as far from the grace and brilliance of the dying aristocracy of the eighteenth century as its clumsy, pretentious furniture and buildings were from the marvellous productions of the *ancien régime*. It was a society of upstarts that was advancing to its dissolution. Its leaders were not great ladies and gallants, standing with graceful cynicism beyond good and evil, but

successful speculators, questionable foreigners and unquestionable strumpets. The *rastaquouère*, the rich, grotesque, flashy exotic, and the *grande cocotte* became the symbols of the age. La Paiva got her palace (in execrable taste, by the way) with its onyx staircase and gold bath; Cora Pearl was the sensation of the day, on whose account people shot themselves; Thérèse sang her dubious *chansons*, which were repeated in the Tuileries by Princess Metternich; but it was all mere frivolity, unredeemed by grace, not a minuet but a *cancan*.

The *cancan* is the epitome and the finale of a period that found its highest artistic expression in the Offenbachian light opera, which brought back a touch of the *esprit*, grace and self-mockery of the eighteenth century to its closing years. It is no mere accident that this great Parisian artist of the period was a foreigner; for his work is as cosmopolitan as himself. The last years of the Second Empire gave Paris and the whole of France a reputation in the eyes of the world which they have not yet lost, an undeserved reputation. It cannot be repeated too often that this cosmopolitan Paris and its court were nothing more than an international recreation-ground. Foreigners flocked to it from all over the world, got what they were looking for, which was luxury and pleasure, and then went about the world extolling—or virtuously reprobating—as the essence of France what had been specially prepared for them. The legend of a frivolous, pleasure-loving, corrupt and vain France, a land of coxcombs and loose women, and of a Paris which is one vast brothel, dates from this period. Since then Paris has been the Mecca of the parvenus and bank-clerks of every nation, the bugbear of every moralist; in short, the very incarnation of Sin, with all the sweetness of forbidden fruit about it. It is a picture which even in those days only corresponded to the extreme outer surface of reality, and now corresponds

to nothing at all; but the wrong ideas which one nation has of another are the most difficult things in the world to eradicate, because the masses cannot form any judgment of their own, and the minority, which could, goes on idly repeating what it has been taught. That explains why Germany, to the Frenchman before 1870, was the land of mediæval castles, "blue flowers" and Romanticism, when it was really the land of Bismarck and Moltke; why people still talk of England as if it were the puritanical England of early Victorian days, and go on about the humdrum, economical French nation, which consists of small rentiers, peasants, officials and workmen, as if they passed their lives amid the brilliant seductions of the boulevard and the brothel.

The international exhibition of 1867 marks the climax of this cosmopolitan brilliance. Visitors flocked to Paris from all over the world, hungry for pleasure; and the court of the Tuileries became the universal rendezvous of royalty. Offenbach composed the *Grand Duchess of Gerolstein* for the occasion, thereby giving the monarchs the chance to see themselves "guyed" on the stage. Everything that former generations had revered or taken seriously was parodied. There were burlesques of classical antiquity—with Helen as a baggage, Menelaus as an imbecile, Calchas as a swindler—and burlesques of the gods of Olympus; "Paris life" was demonstrated by *cocottes* and *rastaquouères*. But whatever the theme, it all ended in the *cancan*. Gods and heroes, kings and *cocottes*, all without distinction whirled round to its strains, faster and faster, in a wild, breath-taking hubbub—till it suddenly broke off. It is amusing but joyless, this burlesque interspersed with strains that presage the coming catastrophe but are drowned in the general hectic uproar. It is a funeral march—redeemed, in spite of everything, by its art—for a corrupt society, whose brilliant façade was

about to collapse; the finale to the fantastic career of the man who had nothing of Napoleon about him but the name, of his wife, who was an Empress only in title, of their renown and their importance. A little while, and Napoleon was defeated and a prisoner, Eugénie a fugitive, France a republic. The façade had collapsed, the *cancan* was finished; but it soon became clear that it was only the façade, not the building that had been destroyed. The Second Empire, with its brief and dearly bought brilliance, was only an episode in the history of the French nation, an illness which it soon threw off. The *cancan* was no national dance of France, "Paris life" was not the life of the French nation.

CHAPTER XII

THE REVIVAL OF ART

IF a country's greatness and importance to the world were determined by its external success and rank as a Power, France would have ceased after the defeat of 1870 to occupy a leading place among the nations of the world. There was in fact no lack of voices, even in France itself, to maintain that France was played out and to prophesy her eclipse. The stagnation, or decadence, of France was contrasted—jubilantly or regretfully, as the case might be—with the rapid advance of victorious Germany; she was compared with the progressive Anglo-Saxon countries and found wanting. *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons* was the title of a book of the period which attracted much attention; this superiority was taken as a matter of course !

It is certainly true that in the period between the two wars of 1870 and 1914 the ascendancy of the "Teutonic countries" (Germany, Great Britain and the United States), which was based on their political and economic superiority, was steadily on the increase, while France grew relatively, though not absolutely, weaker. That anything beyond commercial and industrial expansion, the acquisition of new territory, and larger armaments to defend it—anything, in short, except increase of wealth—could confer influence or importance on a nation, was an idea quite foreign to this period.

Drab materialism in science and utilitarianism in general

outlook were the order of the day. The whole aim and object of existence, to the people of Europe and America, was to make money; wealth in itself, not as a means to an end, had become the supreme goal. They looked with complacency upon the factories that were shooting up everywhere, the growth of shipping, the rising tide of traffic; their trade-balances, which showed a steady increase in imports and exports, filled them with pride. To produce and sell the largest possible quantity of goods was accepted as the only ideal worth a nation's striving. That was the road to wealth and happiness. Everything else was ancillary to it. One had to have colonies, in order to trade with them; and a big army and strong fleet in order to defend one's right to make money all over the world. The nations which possessed all these things were great nations; the others, in descending order of magnitude, nonentities.

The certainty that this universal ambition of the nations to get rich through expansion would lead to wars between them, was overlooked, as it is today by those who preach a return to the greatest possible production as the sum of all wisdom; and people tried to cover up the fact that it was not the nation but certain classes and individuals who got rich. But there was no getting away from it: the growth of industry and the consequent increase in the urban proletariat were attended by a steady and alarming increase of discontent and revolutionary feeling in these "rich and happy" countries. It was the age of the millionaires, of the rise of the Trusts and big combines, during which the struggle for existence took on ever harsher and more brutal forms for the poor. The great inventions destroyed the meaning of time and space, and what was the result? Merely that life grew more hectic and nobody had any more leisure. Means became ends everywhere: machines served to

make more machines, rapid transport to speed things up, money to make yet more money. Hustle, discontent, cut-throat competition, the struggle for existence at its grimmest, combined with a vast increase in luxury, are the most prominent features of this age.

France was spared these "blessings" in a greater degree than any other great nation. In this race she brought up the rear; the United States led the whole world; in Europe, Germany was first, followed by England, whose pace was slackening. Much of what the Second Empire had done for France, the German Empire now did for its people. The rapid progress, the rising prosperity, the colonial conquests all repeated themselves on a larger scale, accompanied by the same unsoundness and swollen head. William II fancied himself as the arbiter of the world, just as Napoleon III had done; under his rule Berlin increased in luxury and brilliance, just as Paris did under Napoleon's. In accordance with the even worse taste of the time, the buildings and monuments which were put up in Berlin are even more hideous than their Parisian prototypes; but they reveal the same ostentatious, inflated, outwardly grand but inwardly empty and bankrupt spirit. Each of these epochs was equally the golden age of speculators and upstarts, a time of material progress and spiritual decline.

Nations, no less than individuals, seem to be subject to the law formulated by the psycho-analysts, that the "libido", the will-power and capacity for desire, is a fixed quantity, and that if you direct it towards one end, you necessarily divert it from others. Clearly, a person whose ambitions are primarily fixed on money-making or the acquisition of power, will not be in the right mental condition to solve the problems of religion or practise the arts. It is less obvious, but no less true, that this applies to whole nations and even epochs. But the individual's

ambition is never concentrated quite exclusively on one object, a fraction of the libido remaining over for other purposes, e.g. pleasure or family life; in the same way a minute portion of the human race will keep clear of the main tendencies of the age, and the rest will follow it with a minute portion of their nature, but this will be negligible compared with those main tendencies and contribute little to the general physiognomy of the period.

It is thus easy to see that in an age dominated by materialism, when the "libido" of the nations was directed to money-making and aggrandisement, there was little left over for art and the things of the mind, and that little varied inversely with the preponderance of the above-mentioned aims. This explains the general artistic decline of the nineteenth century and the varying degrees of that decline in different countries. It is my belief that the cultural history of mankind needs re-writing from this point of view; it would save a lot of mistakes, e.g. that of supposing that the flourishing of the arts is a symptom of decadence (the truth is that the arts flourish when the libido is for some reason or other withdrawn from the path of outward aggrandisement, a process which often coincides with political decline) or of believing in a regular law of development and decline in the arts at all.

Politically speaking, this was a period of diminished power for France; she was left behind in the race for expansion and wealth. Intellectually, on the other hand, it was one of her greatest epochs; here she stood miles ahead of the rest of the world. It was in France that the intellectual content of the nineteenth century found its form, its literary and artistic expression. It is not easy to find a label for it that expresses its whole nature. People usually talk of "Naturalism", by which they mean the ideal of the greatest possible naturalness, the

most perfect fidelity to nature, the most exact imitation of it. Without going into the question whether this ideal is a possible one for art at all, or philosophically tenable, one may say that the description is very far from being exhaustive. What was this thing that arose in France ? It was a reaction against the Romantics, that is to say, a departure from exotic themes, distant ages, and the spirit of the past, as well as from subjectivism and the metaphysical craving. It was not a return to classicism; for classicism in its own, quite different way, also set its ideal in the past; but it was nevertheless a revival of the classical spirit, and this fact takes us very much nearer to the secret of this art than the naturalistic dress in which it clothed itself. The hand-writing, so to speak, is "naturalistic", the matter classical. The art of this period is classical, in that it marks a return to harmony and proportion, is objective, and puts reason first and feeling last. It shows the classical spirit re-asserting itself after many ups and downs, and proves that even in the nineteenth century that spirit was alive enough to become the most genuine expression of the age. Through it art once more joined hands with life, and reflected it symbolically. The books and paintings of the great Frenchmen of the period are definitely an expression of the France of their time, of its society and its life, of the towns and the countryside. They go neither to the ancient world nor to Gothic for inspiration—which is just what makes them classics in the true sense of the word, modern classics, and has given them an influence extending far beyond their own country. Europe recognised itself in the French mirror, and French art and literature once more conquered the world. It was here that the spirit of the age achieved form, and it will continue to live in these works long after the external monuments and landmarks of nineteenth century "civili-

sation " have disappeared. The nineteenth century failed to produce any architecture of importance; its scientific and technical achievements will soon be outstripped and outdistanced and become matters of purely historical interest; but it will survive in the literature (the most important art of the period), the painting and the music which it created, and of these the two first are the creations of France.

Classicism and Romanticism have this much in common, that they regard the present and one's immediate surroundings as unworthy of representation, and both of them regard the externally important as alone worthy of artistic treatment. Literature, in particular, finds none but classical heroes or quite exceptional human beings interesting enough for it to occupy itself with their fate. As against this, Naturalism stands for a greater inwardness and a leaning towards the psychological. It discovered that even outwardly most insignificant people have an inner life of their own, and that the events of that life may be of greater significance than the destinies of queens and heroes. In this way it recovered contact with life, and literature became once more the expression of its age and its environment.

The growth of this new literature was slow. It reached its climax in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but its beginnings go back to Balzac. Balzac is the bridge connecting Romanticism and Naturalism. While some of his stories and characters—Vautrin, for example—are still conceived wholly in the Romantic spirit, in the greater part of his work he belongs to the new school, nay, he is its founder. The society of his day lives for all time in his novels; we know how they talked and how they behaved, how they dressed and what their houses were like, we know the Paris of the period almost better than any city of today. But his picture is not a mere

historical document imprisoned in time and space; it is of universal and permanent interest, because Balzac created human beings.

Balzac knew how to find the eternal element in the most humdrum people, how to draw the type in the individual. His characters grow more real to the reader than many of his own personal acquaintances. Cousine Bette, Père Goriot and many others are people who matter to us, people of our own flesh and blood, people of their own and our and every age. Incidentally, it is worth noting that Balzac was the first person to introduce the great driving force of modern life, money, into art. The heroes of classicism were far too exalted, those of Romanticism far too violently anti-bourgeois, for money ever to play a decisive part in determining their actions. This makes them grotesquely unlike life as it was, and is, actually lived in the bourgeois age. Balzac succeeded in creating something positively monumental out of this "low" motive, in his Gobseck, for instance. His characters live, think and act in the manner of their age; but because the man who created them was a great writer, not a journalist, they take on a symbolic significance.

Balzac is thus the precursor of the modern novel; next to him, and hardly less important, comes Flaubert, his successor in point of time. Flaubert is also still divided between Romanticism and Naturalism, between Salammbô and Madame Bovary; but the naturalistic leaven is so strong in him that he can only treat even the exotic as contemporary: his romanticism is confined to the choice of subject. But above all, he is strongest where Balzac is weakest—in the art of writing, in style. Balzac is the precursor and inspirer of Daudet, Zola and Maupassant; Flaubert of Anatole France.

Zola is the Balzac of the Second Empire and the period immediately following, a Balzac without psychology but

full of epic force. Decried on account of certain crudities as the typical "Naturalist", he is in reality a great symbolist. Not people but abstractions, like drink, machinery or superstition, are, for him, the arbiters of destiny. He is a product of the scientific materialism and the positivist philosophy of his time.

He imagined himself a scientific artist (the laws of heredity and all that), but the scientific basis of his work is a matter of indifference, if not a positive obstacle, to us today. What has survived is his power of controlling large masses and creating an atmosphere, his symbolism—in a word, the great artist. He discovered the proletariat as a subject for the artist, as Balzac had discovered money, and thus became the progenitor of a vast literature. He was also the first person to portray the prostitute, whom literature had till then ignored or romanticised: his Nana is the forerunner of innumerable colleagues, most of whom owe their existence to other than artistic motives. Pure Naturalism, so far as the complete absence of ulterior purpose goes, is to be found in Maupassant, the great master of the short story.

In the whole history of the European novel there is nobody who can be compared in importance with these nineteenth-century Frenchmen, except perhaps its eighteenth-century English founders.

One of the scientist men-of-letters of this period whose importance is still insufficiently recognised is Taine. Not merely modern historical and artistic criticism but also modern psychology, including psycho-analysis, can be traced back to him; without Taine modern intellectual life would be unthinkable.

The French drama of the period is of less importance than the French novel, though here, too, the moving spirit was a Frenchman, Dumas *fil.* Dumas *fil.* is the father of the play with a purpose, of the social and psycho-

logical drama. But his followers in other countries, especially Ibsen, who learnt an immense amount from him on the technical side, are so much more important, so much greater writers, that they have completely overshadowed him. Still, it ought not to be forgotten that he is the starting-point of the drama of Ibsen and Strindberg, Schnitzler and Wedekind. In production a new epoch was created by Antoine, the first master of naturalistic stagecraft, but for whom Germany would have had no Brahm, Russia no Stanislavski, England no Granville Barker.

There may have been other countries besides France in the front rank of literature, even if they exercised no influence, as yet, on Europe; but France, and France alone, is the birthplace of modern painting. Paris in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was what Rome had been in former centuries—the metropolis of the fine arts, whose word was law everywhere, the goal to which artists all over the world lifted up their eyes. Painting, like literature, returned from its wanderings in distant lands and remote ages, and discovered its immediate surroundings. On the threshold of the movement stands Courbet, whose *Enterrement à Ornans* marks the beginning of the new age. It represents a peasant's funeral, a perfectly simple ordinary occurrence, and represents it just as it is, without artificial posing or picturesque lighting-effects. It was this love of sober truth that misled a whole generation into taking Naturalism, i.e. the closest possible approximation to nature, as its artistic ideal. There can seldom have been a drearier or more superficial theory than the underlying one of Naturalism, which starts from the false assumption that our vision of the world as it presents itself to our senses is an objective one, that it is nothing more nor less than the truth. Even were this so, it would still show a complete misunderstanding of the nature of art to maintain that its function

is to copy this objective truth of nature accurately. What on earth for? In former days such copying had a certain informative value (Goethe used to draw ruins of temples in order to be able to refresh his memory of them and show his friends what they were like), but with the introduction of the photograph this has disappeared. Artistically, a copy of nature is quite worthless; the most faithful copies are coloured photographs and waxworks.

The fact is that the age of "scientific materialism" was completely at a loss in dealing with art or, indeed, any non-material values; they refused to fit into its system. Matter was everything, nothing else existed; therefore art, since its existence was indisputable, had to be subordinated to matter.

This unfortunate theory did not, however, succeed in altering the nature of art. The pictures of the naturalistic period are like those of every other period, the product of the entirely subjective and personal emotional life of the artist, and their significance varies with the significance of the artist himself. The only achievement of the Naturalist theory—and it is, when one comes to think of it, a sufficiently remarkable one—was that all the great and successful artists of the time attributed their success, not to the things in which their greatness lies, namely, personality and the talent for expressing it, but to supposed qualities of truth and fidelity to nature which they do not possess at all.

They are faithful to nature and they are truthful, but not at all in the sense postulated by Naturalism. The great artist does not copy nature, he creates as nature creates; his creation is an organic whole. His greatness consists in his intuitive knowledge of underlying laws. The structure, the rhythm, the harmony of his work are completely satisfying to us when they obey these hidden laws and through them express the emotion, hypostatise

the ideal: that is their truth to nature. But that is also the essence of classical art. The classicist adopts a formal language that was originally created to express quite a different content, a content with which he has nothing to do; whereas the classic finds the adequate form for his content, rediscovers the law in accordance with which the ancients gave expression to the spirit that was in them. It is not his formal language, but his essential nature that is classical. In this sense the art of the naturalistic period is great classical art. It is rooted in the tradition which reaches across from the ancient world to Claude Lorrain and Poussin, and thence via Courbet and Manet to Cézanne. In this inward spirit, not in any external classical tradition, lies the secret of the European ascendancy of French art and of its renewed importance at the end of the nineteenth century.

Measure and humanity, in every sense of the word, are the marks of classical art. In its productions there is a reciprocal relation between shapes and proportions, lines and colours, which we feel is the only possible, the right, the true one. That is what "measure" means. Nor does classical art make any immoderate claim on the world's attention: it is modest and has no wish to appear more than it is. All excess, whether of emotion or form, all strangeness and striving after effect are repugnant to it. It also shows measure in the importance it allows to the material as compared with the spiritual, to craftsmanship as compared with soul. It is humane because it recognises man as nature's highest creation and therefore makes him the measure of all things; and modest because, instead of trying to get beyond humanity, it knows its limits and respects them, but is, within those limits, a perfect medium of expression.

French art of the naturalistic period is thus truly classical: it is the perfect plastic expression of the people of

that time, as its literature is their perfect intellectual expression. Millet painted the peasants, the school of Fontainebleau the forests of France. After them came the delineators of Parisian society, the first painters of the modern city, Manet and Degas. Toulouse-Lautrec is the classic of the *canaille*, of the whores of the suburbs, the pimps and the clowns, who attain a tragic, a classical, grandeur under his brush; while everyday life rises to sublimity in the hands of Daumier. These great artists, and a whole series of scarcely less great ones, created a veritable Renaissance.

In this way France, politically outstripped by other countries, and suffering from the effects of a disastrous war, regained her artistic supremacy. It was she who gave Europe the means of spiritual expression. Here, after the separation of the Romantic period, art and life met once more and recemented the alliance that had been in abeyance since the French Revolution. Art joined hands with the scientific research and the rationalistic philosophy of the day. Its spirit was analytical, anti-mystical and anti-metaphysical, as Society had become; magnificent in its narrowness, perfect within its self-imposed limits; an earnest spirit, steeped in social feeling; but this feeling, instead of being fatal to art as it was in other countries, fitted into the general harmony.

Here we have once more a great European art and literature, an expression of the European spirit. Its importance has not been sufficiently recognised, because we are still too near to it and our age can hardly be expected to do it justice. The society which it portrayed has disappeared, its spirit is disintegrated, and today and yesterday are poles apart. The art of yesterday was entirely of this world, rationalistic, sensuous, bourgeois in the best sense of the word, as none but Dutch art had been before it. In all these respects it is as far from the ideals

of present-day youth as it was from the Romantics. But its main claim to be called a great artistic and intellectual epoch is the number and importance of the artists and writers that it produced. In the midst of all this talk about the "spirit of the age" and the "expression of the period", about orientation and intellectual content and technique, one must never forget that the only thing that really matters in art is the great artist. The great artist is conditioned by the age to which he belongs, but he transcends it.

His "orientation" is of no interest to posterity, but his personality is immortal. The period under discussion is one of the greatest in the history of France, and what makes it so is the fact that during it France produced men like Balzac and Stendhal, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant and Anatole France, Courbet and Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec and Daumier—creators of a style, an attitude, an epoch.

CHAPTER XIII

FIN DE SIÈCLE

EVERY boom is inevitably followed by a slump, every great classical age by a period of decadence. Yet this decadence is not without its charm and not without its value. Movements or works of art of this kind ought to be regarded and judged as entirely natural phenomena, and not from a totally inappropriate moral point of view. In the life of nature, high summer is followed by the decay of autumn; individuals, families, nations, civilisations all have their rise and fall—great movements which include many smaller rises and falls within them. Loss of strength is counterbalanced by increase of subtlety; massive unity gives way to the fine shade, great vitality to great sensibility, blazing noon to sunset and twilight, after which comes night and, eventually, a new day.

At the end of the nineteenth century twilight descended on Europe, and on France. The *fin de siècle* atmosphere signified something more than the end of a century; it foreshadowed the end of a cultural epoch, which has since come to pass, and it has many points of kinship, both externally and internally, with the dying eighteenth century. The age grew weary, *blasé*, critical and destructive; it had had enough of great enthusiasms and mighty works, and hated anything noisy or violent; the healthiness of its predecessors seemed to it proletarian, their eagerness plebeian, their bigness coarse.

These people knew all about everything and smiled at it: problems or tragic passions no longer existed for

them, but they had any amount of intelligence and any amount of taste. They created no present and believed in no future, but they understood and enjoyed the past. No new flowers sprang up, but the old varieties were refined and crossed. Art and literature gradually lost their significance for ordinary life again and became the privilege of the connoisseur. Exquisiteness, æstheticism, art for art's sake were the order of the day.

Paris was the centre in which this attitude found its most complete expression. A craze for the eighteenth century set in and people began to "collect" and fill their houses with antique furniture. It became the newest thing to hate "modern art", once its short efflorescence (the *Jugendstil*), which never amounted to much in France, was over. Pastel and Gobelin shades became the vogue and people went in for collecting little, delicate, fragile things like china, miniatures, snuff-boxes and the like. All the charming trifles devised by the eighteenth century suddenly became priceless treasures: *vieux-saxe* was worth its weight in gold, colour-prints cost fortunes. Fashions became fussy and elaborate, with *volants* and *ruches*, frillies and laces—the *frou-frou* style. The women did their best to be pale, delicate and nervous. They made up their faces white, with bright red lips and dark shadows under the eyes, and went in for being "misunderstood" and neurotic, wandering from spa to spa and indulging in psychological complexities. All that art and literature could do now was to provide stimulation for the nerves.

Baudelaire, long dead, found his public at last, which shared his *spleen* and would have liked to find his *paradis artificiels*. Verlaine dreamed of ghosts walking about in old gardens, of grey, rainy days and moonlight. His moon is not the moon in the stormy sky of the Romantics, but the moon of *vaste et tendre apaisement*, for which

these tired men and women longed. Paul Bourget provided them with subtle, well-bred love stories, which explored the corners of their psyche, which they themselves thought so complicated, with affectionate care; Loti and Farrère conducted these weary elegants through exotic and remote countries; Mirbeau and Jean Lorrain lost themselves in the artificial labyrinths of a highly refined sexuality, and Wilde had his admirers in Paris too, although he is in reality merely an interpreter of Parisian *décadence* to the "barbarian" countries.

Nor had dramatic literature any other aim. Abroad the Norwegians and the Russians and their progeny reigned supreme, but Paris was bored by these problems. It no longer took the theatre seriously: plays rang the changes on the theme of the eternal triangle and provided brilliant dialogue or sentimentality in agreeable doses. They were subtle with Porto-Riche (too subtle for a big success), theatrical with Bernstein, mildly emotional with Bataille, or vaguely scientific with Curel. But nobody took any real interest in them: people went to the theatre to see particular actors and, above all, actresses. Paris supplied the world with great stars, like Sarah Bernhardt, Réjane, Jane Hading, Bartet, Guitry, who dominated the stage. Maeterlinck produced his tired, shadowy semblances of plays, in which the half-veiled characters, looking as if they had stepped out of faded tapestries, spend most of their time in silence.

In music the great figure was Debussy, whose greatest work, *Pélleas et Melisande*, was produced in co-operation with Maeterlinck. Debussy is the first Impressionist in music; delicate, soft, monotonous and destructive of all form, like the rain in his little poem for the piano, *Le jardin sous la pluie*.

Impressionism, and especially Impressionist painting, is the truest expression of this epoch. To be sure, the work

of Renoir, Claude Monet, Pissaro and Sisley is contemporaneous with that of Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and Manet, but that does not prevent it from belonging to another period. At any given moment there are always several intellectual generations living side by side, and the actual age of a painter does not in itself settle the question to which he belongs : thus Manet, Claude Monet and Cézanne, though contemporaries, belong to three successive epochs.

The Impressionist painter no longer sees the fixed, solid world of his predecessors; it has begun to move and wobble and dissolve. This is the artistic counterpart of intellectual scepticism. Nothing is fixed, everything is in flux; form does not exist, everything is dissolved in light. Planes break up into dots and dashes of colour, the brush-strokes and spots dance and vibrate, there is no longer any such thing as a fact of nature, only discontinuous motion. Everything is equally important or unimportant; a human being is of no more consequence than a wall, a tree, or running water (one of the reasons why Impressionism is bound to fail in the portrait); in fact, there is no such thing as a human being, there are only reflexes of light and colour-vibrations, which sometimes solidify into a human shape.

The art of this period purports to be scientific, in virtue of the connection between its painting technique and the science of optics complementary colours etc.), the atomic theory and so on; but its value certainly no more lies in this sort of naturalism than that of its predecessor did. There were a number of quite considerable painters—"pure painters"—at work at this time, lyrists in colour, incredibly subtle and delicate in their tones and—a fact which is too often disregarded—essentially Parisian. Impressionist art is the product of Parisian *esprit* and the mild, soft air and light of the country round Paris, and

only there is it perfectly genuine. Impressionist methods were imported into other countries and applied to other kinds of scenery—the Impressionists were, of course, primarily landscape-painters—but neither in Potsdam nor in Holland, neither in Italy nor in Russia, did art and reality (or rather, appearance !) quite fit. Only on the Seine do you find quite that shimmer, not on the Thames, nor the Rhine, nor the Tiber. Impressionist art did not bear transplantation; other countries' attempts at it were clumsy, their "decadence" lacked grace and light-heartedness. Perhaps that is why Paris exercised its greatest fascination over foreigners in a time of comparative decline. A sense of impending danger was in the air everywhere, autumn had descended on the whole world, but nowhere was it so sunny, so gorgeous in its exit, or so beautiful.

The *fin de siècle* atmosphere spread all over Europe from Paris, and this misled European opinion into regarding France as a decadent nation. The mentality of limited, if influential, circles in Paris was mistaken for that of the French nation. We have seen that this opinion had already grown up during the episode of Napoleon III, and nothing dies harder than one nation's prejudices against another. The marvellous rapidity with which France recovered from her defeat and its consequences ought to have sufficed to prevent this mistake, while her intellectual and artistic renaissance was bound, one would have thought, to make such a view give place to its opposite; but it did not do so. In the eyes of Englishmen, Germans or Russians, many of them constant visitors to the country, the French nation remained frivolous, pleasure-loving, devoid of morals—in a word, decadent.

The birth-rate was stationary. People overlooked the fact that all the European nations, in proportion to their height in the scale of civilisation, approximated to the

same condition, that the birth-rate was falling everywhere, and insisted on regarding it as the most conclusive proof of decadence. It is equally legitimate to regard all civilisation as decadent—a very popular view today, especially among people who are themselves over civilised; after all, it is a “falling-off” from the state of nature; only this line of argument leads to the conclusion that man is altogether a decadent creature as compared with the lower animals.

As a matter of fact, France was, and is, one of the soundest nations in Europe; so far from showing any symptoms of either mental or physical degeneration, it has all the vitality characteristic of the Latin races as a whole in every age. One of the reasons why those races have remained healthy is, undoubtedly, the small extent to which their countries have become industrialised as compared with the northern countries.

France is still a predominantly agricultural country, containing a large number of well-to-do peasants and a relatively small urban proletariat. It has altogether remarkably few large towns, and the majority of Frenchmen still lead the same old, modest, provincial life. The France of the decadent *fin de siècle* was a country of peasants, small rentiers and worthy citizens, who had as little to do with the intellectual currents of Parisian society as with the Eskimos. Economically, France was better off than any other country: there were few vast fortunes and little abject poverty; the clerical problem apart, the majority of the nation was quite indifferent to politics, and left them, along with all other tiresome intellectual questions, to the Parisians. The attitude of the average Frenchman towards Paris was exactly the same as the foreigner's—pious horror, based on mistaken notions, at its naughtiness, combined with a strong desire to explore this modern Babylon for himself.

The difference was that foreigners identified their idea of Paris with the whole of France, whereas the French knew that, so far from being identical, they were exact opposites. It is impossible to lay too much stress on this point. In a book like this it needs to be repeated again and again : the things in France that matter to Europe and influence it, whether for good or ill, are not by any means necessarily those that are most important to France itself. Every nation is constantly refashioning itself and always has tasks and problems on hand which seem to it more important than anything else; but it does not follow that these problems also mean anything to any other nation. The importance of France to Europe lies in this, that it has often happened that a question of fundamental importance to Europe as a whole was first raised and answered there. French Gothic, the absolute monarchy and the French Revolution were of European significance; the French Renaissance and the French Romantic movement were family affairs, which did not, however, make them any less important to the French themselves. In the same way, the fact that at the end of the last and beginning of the present century the French nation was living in quiet and modest prosperity, while the industrialisation and proletarianisation of the masses was making giant strides among its northern neighbours, accompanied by the growth of huge fortunes and an ever more threatening social problem, had no effect and made no impression on the rest of the world; whereas the fact that a small society in Paris, gifted with abnormally sensitive nerves and acute hearing, was seized with the weariness which comes before a catastrophe and made ready for the crash which it saw coming, was of European and more than European significance.

CHAPTER XIV

CHAOS

THE autumnal weariness of the nineties passed, almost imperceptibly, into the hectic, nervous and over-stimulated atmosphere which preceded the world war and has survived it.

Many, if not all, of the symptoms of the disintegration and decay of a society and an epoch, which are obvious to everybody today and for the most part wrongly regarded as consequences of the war, were already visible in the pre-war years, and nowhere more clearly than in Paris, where people became daily more convinced that they were heading for a catastrophe, dancing on a volcano, and that everything had become meaningless and untenable. The age-long French tradition seemed to be breaking up; the structure of bourgeois society, maintained in equilibrium at the cost of so much effort, was swaying and revealing larger cracks every day; the political skies, both domestic and foreign, grew menacing, the temper of the workers embittered, the reaction stronger. Everything was called in question and even art and science, the last refuge of those who were sick of the dust and heat, were caught up in the storm.

All at once everything that had seemed secure was assailed on every side and thrown into the melting-pot. In every department—science, art, politics, society—revolution seemed imminent. Everything suddenly became an open question once more, unrest and change

were in the air everywhere; but people neither could nor would see the connection between all these disturbances. The reign of scientific materialism, and of the rationalism intimately associated with it, the supremacy of the intellect, was drawing to its close, and an age of unfettered instinct, plunging back deep into barbarism but also reaching out beyond the intellect, was on the point of beginning. All around old truths were falling in ruins; a new order was struggling to be born; the ground had long been heaving, but nobody would believe in the earthquake.

Radium had been discovered, and radiology had destroyed all ideas of the immutability of matter. Matter dissolved into thin air; nothing remained but energy manifesting itself in motion; this whole physical universe was merely a conglomeration of forces. The philosophical concept of the *élan vital* made its appearance, also in Paris; life was now viewed not as a somewhat that is moved but as motion which is its own content. The intellect was deposed, and intuition (on the nature of which nothing can be said) was raised to the throne in its stead.

These scientists (Curie) and philosophers (Bergson) professed doctrines which had only a short time ago been laughed out of court by all "rational people", and busied themselves, in combination with doctors and psychologists, with "occult" problems. With "instinct", the "subconscious", the riddle of personality, also came on to the scenes. Suggestion, hypnosis, trance-states and spiritualism were made the subject of scientific investigation by men like Bergson, Charcot, Janet and Flammarion. Human personality, about which people had thought they knew everything, seemed to dissolve and swell to vast proportions at the same time. The solid basis of knowledge had disappeared.

The great masses remained, of course, perfectly

indifferent to these questions. It is always the same story: the revolution begins in the heads of a few thinkers, whose apparently abstract doubts and conclusions are quite unintelligible to the crowd. A scientist discovers that the earth is not the centre of the universe, and that means the end of the Middle Ages and ecclesiastical supremacy, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Thirty Years' War. It is only the material consequences that the masses can understand. At the time we are considering, however, the physical novelties and changes affecting material life were fully as revolutionary as the intellectual ones, and affected everyone in the most direct way possible. The unprecedented progress of invention had completely transformed everybody's life, and particularly that of the dweller in great cities. Motor cars rushed through the streets hooting and roaring, aeroplanes buzzed in the sky, the telephone and the telegraph brought the distance to people's doors and left them no peace, electric light gleamed and danced and blinded their eyes. Every day, every minute, the human senses were subjected to the coarsest and most violent stimuli. A tempest of restlessness, hurry, speed, noise and confusion burst upon the world, which had less time and more to fit into it in proportion as it had been promised greater speed and an increase of leisure from these inventions. The human organism had sufficient flexibility to adapt itself, but not without altering itself in the process. The new tempo produced a new type of human being—harassed, nervous and restless. Before long movement, hustle had ceased to be a means and become an end—restlessness for restlessness' sake, motion without an object to be moved, translated from philosophy into daily life.

All this is epitomised in Luna Park. When people have finished their work and want recreation, they can only get it by means of still more violent motion, louder

noise, stronger stimulation of the senses. They require to be whirled round like tops gone crazy and deafened by the noise of the crowd and the music, in order that the chaos of everyday life may seem tolerable by comparison. Luna Park with its mechanical amusements is a product of America, as were all the novelties imported into Paris in this period. The insanity of the whole world seemed to reach its climax in Paris, where the condition, known in other countries as post-war neurosis, was already prevailing years before the war. Nothing is more typical of the period than the dancing-craze which set in at this time, when whole sections of society succumbed to the fascination of exotic dances and barbaric music. The *valse lente* of the Decadence made way for the tango, the maxixe and the foxtrot, and the whole world began to twist and stumble feverishly. Dancing ousted every other form of entertainment. Nobody took any interest in the drama any longer, and only very few in the theatre. Tiny miniature theatres produced highly refined indecencies or horrors to tickle jaded palates, like the Grand Guignol. The revue made a great show, with mass effects, naked women and tom-toms. The film raced across the screen—and life itself seemed to have become a film.

These were the great days of Montmartre—not the old, Parisian Montmartre of the artists, but a Montmartre where every other house was a brothel, all of them there for the benefit of the foreigners and patronised exclusively by them. The apaches became fashionable and people flocked to the taverns which they were supposed to frequent. And when these excitements palled, as they very soon did, they took to cocaine and ether. It was a witches' sabbath, a carnival of despair, heavy with forebodings of the end of a world.

Paris was still the centre of things as it had been in the

past; but all it could do now was to adapt foreign stuff: the real France had retired to the provinces. The fine arts became unstable, one new movement following another. Futurism was supplanted by Cubism, by Simul-tanism and finally by the baby-talk of Dada. Negro art was all the rage; nothing could be primitive, barbaric, naïve enough, or shout loud enough. Fashions became—under Russian influence—highly coloured, exotic and oriental, but oriental in a barbaric way, and interior decoration and the applied arts followed their example. Parisian taste yielded to the influence of Munich and Moscow; Russians, Italians, Spaniards, Americans and negroes were its arbiters. To all appearance the French tradition, as it did not join in the shouting, was dead. Society went to pieces. The best-known women in Paris were *demi-mondaines*. Society women and whores patronised the same dancing-places or haunts of pleasure, mixed and grew more and more like each other; people who maintained some reserve were considered absurd and out of date. Bourgeois morality was left to the provinces and to humble folk. Intellectual interests had ceased. People drove about in motor cars and went in for sport or—better still—watched it: boxing-matches and six-day races appealed to aristocratic ladies quite as much as to the mob. Murder- and robbery-cases were the order of the day and the fitting climax came when the minister's wife murdered the newspaper editor, and was acquitted.

This was in July, 1914. Not one single feature of the contagion that spread through the great cities of Europe during and after the war, but was already visible in Parisian life at this time. These phenomena are not the result of the war, but symptoms of the break-down of all values, like the war itself; and they first appeared in the nerve-centre of the western world.

In the meantime clouds had gathered on the horizon

of foreign politics. The moment for which large sections of heavy industry, finance and the militarists in every country had long been pining, was at hand. In Paris, as everywhere, the masses went patiently and unsuspectingly about their business; in spite of every alarm-signal people refused to believe in the catastrophe—even after the murder of Sarajevo.

There was a revue then running in Paris in which Voltaire appeared as a character. He had a number of biting couplets given to him on the subject of vice and frivolity, corruption and decay, and prophesied the catastrophe, to the refrain of *Vive le son du canon!* In the thunder of the guns this world was destined to go under—and to purge itself. . . .

CHAPTER XV

PARIS

THE idea that Paris is France and the rest of France nothing has been getting more and more firmly fixed in the minds of all nations for the last hundred years. Though a complete illusion it is not an inexplicable one. We have seen how, with the decay of the absolute monarchy, Paris stepped into the position of Versailles, how its position was confirmed by the Revolution, and how each successive regime made it its first care to keep the Parisians quiet at all costs. The more firmly the supremacy of the bourgeoisie established itself, the more powerful and influential Parliament and the Press became, the greater became the importance of the capital, in which the political, intellectual and artistic life of the country was centred.

In this sense Paris does stand for France; but as its importance has grown it has cut itself off more and more from the life of the country, the two have become more and more remote from each other. Nowhere is the contrast between the metropolis and the provinces so great as in France; nowhere is everything outside the capital so exceedingly provincial. But these Provinces contain thirty-seven out of the forty million inhabitants of France. Here and not in Paris—although there is plenty that is provincial to be found in Paris too, if one looks for it—is the real France; here is the age-old French tradition, here are the traces of all the civilisations out of which that tradition grew. It is not at all necessary to seek out the remote

districts—Celtic Brittany, still lapped in its dreams and superstitions, or the Auvergne with its mediæval and suspicious peasantry, or Provence which still half belongs to the ancient world : wherever one goes in France life is conducted on entirely different lines—in an entirely different age, one had almost said—from life in Paris. On the one hand, Catholicism is very much alive everywhere—churches, priests, convents, pious bourgeois women, whose lives oscillate between domesticity and Mass, an unbroken tradition of family solidarity. On the other hand, the republican spirit, the clear-cut, Latin sense of equality and justice, the “spirit of 1789”, is equally ubiquitous and equally alive. (The balance between them naturally varies very much in different parts of the country : in a general way, the South is more Latin, free and republican, the North more Gothic, reactionary and pious.)¹ Paris thus has a vast, unexhausted, uncorrupted reservoir behind it, from which it is constantly recruiting its strength. It can afford to be all brain and nerve-centre, to yield to every whim, carry every fashion to its extreme, to be perpetually changing and letting itself be corrupted. It continually renews itself, and the French nation remains at bottom quite untouched by what goes on in Paris. This constitutes an enormous difference between France and most other countries (I believe that the position is much the same in Russia and also in Spain), and an enormous asset to the nation’s physical and mental health. Paris is only France in intellectual and artistic matters; in every other respect it is not merely not France, but its exact antithesis.

¹ In such a general statement as this, numerous important details are, of course, left out of account. Towns like Lyons and Marseilles have a life of their own which cannot be called provincial, while the industrial provinces of the north-east, as might be expected from their particular character, are much more akin to the Belgian or even the Rhenish industrial area than to the France that I have described ; but these details make no difference to the general picture.

Nevertheless it is not unnatural that Paris should mean France to the whole non-French world, because Paris is the side that France shows to the world. Paradoxical as it may sound, Paris matters more to the rest of the world than to France itself : it is France's great gift to Europe. All the nations have contributed to the mosaic that is called Europe, but their gifts are not all of the same kind. This one's greatest contribution may be the work of a great poet, that one's a piece of country; it may be a school of painting or it may be code of laws : in the case of modern France it is Paris, the centre and birthplace of modern political, intellectual and artistic Europe. Were such a thing possible, Paris ought to be extra-territorial, the common possession of the whole white race.

As far back as the Middle Ages Paris was the seat of a university, and Pope Alexander IV wrote: —“ Paris fills the whole earth with the wealth of its learning, puts darkness to flight and reveals the secrets of knowledge to the world.” Dante was a pupil of the Sorbonne. At the Renaissance Italy took the lead, then Spain; but the eighteenth century restored the supremacy of France and Paris, where the new Europe was in due course born, with Voltaire and Rousseau, the Revolution and Napoleon. Seekers after knowledge streamed into Paris from every land, or submitted in their own homes to the influence which radiated from it. This privileged position Paris has retained : there is a double process constantly at work, by which new currents flow in from abroad, take shape here, and go forth again in that shape to fertilise the outside world. Paris has the final say in the matter of world success. The book, the play, the picture, the actor or the theory which succeeds here, has made good all over the western world. The exception is music, where the verdict of the world depends on Germany : in everything else France is what Rome was once.

Through being the centre of Europe it is also its barometer. The coming "weather" in politics and public questions, art and literature, fashion, taste and social matters, is anticipated and first reveals itself there. Paris is the centre of Europe's nervous system, a position which it has neither consciously sought nor claimed, but was predestined by natural and historical circumstances to fill, just as they marked out the Mediterranean and the countries bordering on it as the cradle of western civilisation.

What circumstances? Why this and not some other great European capital? Have they not all their educational institutions and homes of art, their great artists and intellectual leaders, their buildings, their industry, their trade? And are these not often superior to anything that Paris can show? Is not London more imposing, Rome richer in beautiful things, Berlin more modern? Undoubtedly. In what does Paris excel then? In everything and nothing. There is very little one can cite that cannot be improved upon elsewhere, and a great deal that is better done elsewhere; but Paris is the happiest blend, produced by natural historic processes, of all the ingredients of which Europe is composed.

The French nation represents a complete mixture and synthesis of the chief races and cultures which together make up Europe. It is a blend of Latin, Gallo-Celtic and Teutonic elements (only the Slavonic is missing, an important point at this particular juncture), the meeting-place of Christianity and pagan culture, the cradle of enlightenment and the modern spirit. In comparison with France all other countries are provincial—if the centre of which we are thinking is the centre of European civilisation, not the geographical centre. They are either too Latin and pagan or too northern and Gothic, too African or Asiatic. It is this that gives them their more strongly

marked individuality : nature and man, colouring and character are more primitive, original and inimitable in Andalusia and Sicily, in Scandinavia and Hungary, than in France; they are, like their climate, more extreme. France is the Middle Kingdom, averse from all extremes. Its climate is temperate, neither northerly nor southerly, its people neither very fair nor very dark; it is not easy to find any type which can be called purely French. The French are an essentially intermediate type.

Inside France, again, the district round Paris, the Ile de France, is a synthesis of north, south, east and west. In the east the French type merges into a series of Franco-German crossbreeds. That whole slice of country which formed the old kingdom of Lorraine—Belgium, the valley of the Moselle, Lorraine, Alsace and Switzerland—is an intermediate area, both in its natural features and in the character of its inhabitants : there is no sharp division between France and Germany. Normandy is linked in the same way with England, Brittany with its kindred Cornwall, in spite of the intervening water. The Basques and the people of Languedoc link up with Spain; racially speaking, Italy extends almost as far as Marseilles, France well into Piedmont. All these districts, again, are provincial in the narrower sense. Neither in the forests of the Ardennes and the Vosges nor on the foggy channel coast, neither on the Atlantic nor on the Mediterranean coast, could a Paris have grown up : for that the air, light, soil and climate of the Ile de France were necessary.

It is not the North, if one thinks of England or Germany, nor the South, if one thinks of Spain or of Italy. It is neither flat plain nor mountain country, but a broad river-valley bounded by hills. The soil is neither poor nor rich, but it produces the most delicate and perfect fruits; the sky is neither of an Italian blue nor of a northern dullness; it is a delicate blue-grey, full of fine

shades and subtle variations. Nowhere is the natural colour-scheme so little garish and yet so far removed from drabness. Sensuous but not animal, neither dry nor luxuriant, but charming, gracious and discreetly attractive, a blend of light-hearted gaiety and gentle wistfulness—that is the Ile de France, which has formed and moulded the European men and women who grew up in it till their genius has come to resemble that of the country in which they live—healthy without being robust, sensual but in a charming way, free from all extremes, capable of appreciating the finest shades, neither flat nor towering, neither strident nor dull, not too northern to understand the South nor too southern to understand the North, full of intelligence but without the capacity for feeling being impaired thereby, at once critical and creative; a genius in which all comers, from north, south, east or west, have found something akin to themselves, but also what was lacking in themselves; a harmony which transforms the inharmonious, an atmosphere which possesses the secret of enhancing everyone's particular individuality.

Other districts, countries or nations may be grander or have produced mightier works, but none of them have produced anything of more consequence to European humanity than the city of Paris which has grown up on this soil. For Paris is a supreme work of art, and, like all great works of art, has the appearance of a work of nature, so perfectly are the consciously planned, the naturally conditioned and the apparently spontaneous elements blended in it. Like all masterpieces, Paris gives one the feeling of inevitability: one cannot imagine it otherwise. Between the hills a river valley, and in it an island, the germ of the city; on this island the temple, in later years the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the city's sacred emblem set in its innermost fastness; and the old

Roman road still running past it straight as a die from north to south, with the remains of the imperial palace still flanking it.

This road is intersected by one running east and west, which ends as a *via triumphalis*. Like a tree, the city has added new rings to itself in the course of the centuries, in the shape of belts of fortifications which have turned into broad thoroughfares—the inner boulevards, the outer boulevards, the belt that is now to become a promenade. It has spread out and climbed the hills, setting a symbolic crown on each—the great cemetery of Père Lachaise; the Panthéon, resting-place of the great dead who were leaders of the people in their generation, from Voltaire to Jaurès; the triumphal arch of the great Napoleon; and the Sacré Cœur of the faithful.

Paris is a miracle of unbroken historical continuity, of all times, but always of the present. It has never become a museum, like Rome, where every new building strikes a note of anachronism; yet it has destroyed nothing essential. Perpetually changing, it has yet always preserved its character, and no change has upset the original idea. What is already there fits in with the new thing of the moment without spoiling the effect, and the new thing always appears to be a continuation of the old. Nothing is out of place. Even the nineteenth century may build its Madeleine here, where there are Roman buildings still standing, perfectly in their element. Gothic cathedrals may tower above the earth here, for it is the place where the Gothic genius first took form. Here the daughter of the Medici built her Florentine palace, next door to the Roman Emperor's. The Baroque age and the bourgeois monarchy put up their buildings, Napoleon III created a new emblem in the opera-house, and even the Third Republic built new thoroughfares, which give the impression of having been there from time

immemorial. There have been countless transformations everywhere; large quarters have disappeared, vast new streets are in process of construction, there is hardly a building that has remained unchanged; and yet everything seems as if it had always been like that, as if it simply could not be otherwise. Even the Eiffel Tower has become an integral part of the scheme, and the *via triumphalis* looks as if it had been designed to be the perfect motor-road.

This continuity, which never ceases to be organic and alive, and this European universality are peculiar to Paris. There are classical colonnades in Edinburgh, but they are sad, grimy, grotesque things, standing there in the midst of their dreary Romantic surroundings; the buildings in the Latin taste in Munich look like stage decorations, the Gothic cathedrals in Italy as if they had lost their way. In Paris they are all at home, because everything European has a second home there.

In this sense, and on these grounds, Paris may be called the capital of Europe; for its architecture merely symbolises the European spirit in all ages. It was only here that Roman, German, English influences could creep in without seeming out of place, and only here that they could be turned into something European, that the European spiritual synthesis could happen.

To many Frenchmen and most Parisians Paris has long since become too European, too international. Ever since the days of the Second Empire, every generation has lamented that the real Paris was dying out. These lamentations are probably justified, if one persists in regarding Paris merely as the capital of France. In becoming the capital of Europe it has changed its character, but from the European point of view one cannot regret it.

In any case, there is no longer any point in lamentations

or even rejoicings on this subject; for Paris had already entered upon a new phase of its existence, had changed from a European capital into a cosmopolis, before the war, and this process of development is advancing with giant strides at the present moment. Never has the invasion of foreigners from all over the world been so huge, never has the proportion of foreigners to Frenchmen in its population altered so rapidly at the expense of the latter. Paris is in the midst of a crisis, and a vast deal depends for the whole of Europe on the way that crisis ends.

French Paris really consisted of a number of provincial towns that had coalesced but all preserved their own characters: the foreigners were confined to the amusement quarter and the west end. There was the provincial, entirely French and Catholic town round about St. Sulpice, full of old ladies, always dressed in black, and priests; there was the old aristocratic quarter of St. Germain, where everybody was either a count or a greengrocer; the military town round about the Champ de Mars; the students' town by the Boul' Mich'; the town of the cabinet-makers; and of the prosperous bourgeoisie of Passy; the Montmartre of the artists and the prostitutes; and many other towns. Now the foreign invasion is threatening to sweep them all away. The Russians have arrived in shoals and occupied whole districts; the Americans dig themselves in wherever they think they have found a quaint, romantic bit of old France; Chinamen, Japanese, Siamese and negroes have taken possession of the Latin Quarter; and people from the Balkans and South America have taken the place of the old, cultured public of foreign pleasure-seekers. Paris has long been the world-capital of pleasure. That the boulevards only exist for the foreigners now, that the language of the Champs-Élysées is Anglo-American, and the Rue de la Paix cosmopolis—all this is an old story: in its way

it is a very fine thing, and the real Paris is hardly touched by it. These foreigners come and go, even if one does get the impression of always seeing the same faces. The stream of visitors remains on the surface. And even the big colonies of permanent foreign residents constituted no danger formerly; for they combined to form a cosmopolitan society, which added one more touch to the picture but remained entirely distinct from French society. The people who did matter to Paris were the intellectuals of all countries, who, instead of sticking to the crowd of their own countrymen and living in Paris just as if they were at home, drank in the spirit of the place and mingled in its life, receiving much from it and giving as much or even more in return, no matter whence they came or whither they were going, a Picasso and a George Moore, Rilke or Santayana, Joyce or d'Annunzio—the list might be prolonged to infinity. The people who came to sit at the feet of Maillol or Matisse, of Bergson or Curie—these are the people that matter, and it matters whether they will continue to come and will continue to find what they want.

Will this super-European intellectual capital, which one would like to see officially declared a *monument sur-national*, the property of humanity, be able to continue to fulfil its function? It is paradoxical but true that its position as a supernational city is endangered by its excess of foreigners; for it has only been able to maintain it in the past, and can only do so now, by retaining its own essential character. It can only remain European by remaining Parisian, remaining French. One finds oneself anxiously asking whether it may not be on the point of losing this character: whether it may not be becoming American or Russian or Chinese or negroid—an international Luna Park instead of the intellectual capital of Europe.

Paris is now faced with the biggest task it has ever been called upon to perform. Europe is as much disintegrated, as much in want of a leader, intellectually as politically. It looks to Moscow and it looks to Paris and it also looks to New York. It can go Russian or it can Americanise itself; but it can only remain European, or rather, become so once more, through the agency of Paris.

But what if Paris itself becomes Russian or American ?

If Paris is to retain its leadership, it has got to absorb all these foreign influences; it may not ignore them, even if it would or could; and time must show whether the new spirit, for which the whole world is yearning, can emerge from it all, leaving the old European synthesis far behind.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEW EUROPEAN FORMULA

THERE is not much left of Europe, of a spiritual Europe, that is to say. Russia, whether one admires or damns it, is not Europe. Central Europe is the Balkans writ large. England is steadily detaching itself from the Continent: with its colonies it forms a continent in itself, far closer in spirit to America, with which it is connected by ties of race, than to the continent of Europe. Only those things in Europe that had sufficient historical roots have remained intact, or at any rate escaped destruction. Europe was built up on two great ideas, the ancient Roman and the Catholic Christian. Everything else was added later or insufficiently absorbed, and therefore, when the great crisis came, broke off and crumbled away, becoming merely national or dying off. Only where the ancient Romans and the Roman Church laid their foundations betimes, has the building remained standing. This invisible Empire, without national frontiers, still exists and is Europe's one strength. It comprises the two southern peninsulas of Spain and Italy, France, Germany up to an invisible frontier running through Westphalia or thereabouts, Austria and the succession states. Its centre of gravity today is in France, where the economic and spiritual disintegration is relatively slight: for which reason it is France's task to re-build Europe.

This task is one of immense difficulty. For France to

have remained the old France, even had it happened, would not be enough; for a classical *cum* Catholic France could no longer fit in with the rest of Europe. The hub of the non-Latin, and larger, half of Europe is Germany. The question whether there can ever be a Europe again depends upon the possibility of Franco-German co-operation: everything else is secondary. But the ancient civilisation and the Catholic Church never struck very deep roots in Germany; and at the present moment it is much more under the influence of the East than of the West. This is where the danger of a permanent schism in Europe lies. Central Europe is already too "eastern" to join hands with a classical and Catholic Western Europe to form a single whole. Everything there is fermenting and seeking a new form, but it must be a *new* form; the old one, which perhaps still means something to Western Europe, has lost all meaning for Central Europe. Central Europe has completely lost touch with the classical spirit, with measured beauty and harmony; it has more points of contact with China and India than with Athens and Rome. If France is to save Europe by finding a "European formula", she will first have to be born again herself. A new spirit, more akin to that of the rest of Europe than the old French spirit was, will need to have arisen, or be in the process of arising, in her. The miracle of Gothic must be re-enacted.

Just as Gothic arose from a synthesis of foreign elements which took place in France, so the new European spirit can only be evolved in one way—by the innumerable foreign influences, which have been pouring into France for decades past, crystallising into a new form, which all nations will accept for their own; for, being the product of all these foreign elements, it will not seem foreign or "French" to them.

I venture to assert that this is actually happening. A

new European spirit, a European formula, is being evolved, a start has been made and parts of the work are even complete. Paris is equal to its job.

From the point of view of the non-French world, of Europe, France means Paris. We have seen how this Paris has steadily, and faster than ever since the war, grown into the great metropolis of foreigners. In my chapter entitled "Chaos" I have described how purely French Paris broke up. It was the beginning of a new age; the birth of the new, European spirit was already starting then. All the innumerable foreigners who came and stayed in Paris in order to undergo its influence, began in their turn to influence it. There was nothing deliberate or intentional about this; it was a matter of historical necessity. The most vigorous productive forces from every country met here, and from their unconscious co-operation something new emerged. The Spaniards, Russians, Germans, Slavs, the Asiatics, negroes and Americans, the painters, sculptors, writers, students and thinkers from every country, who lived here for years, did not, as it might seem, have a merely disturbing effect; they also contributed, and from this complicated, underground co-operation, this interplay of heterogeneous forces, something new is emerging, something in which the whole of Europe, and more than Europe, is involved. Something is emerging which all conservative Frenchmen and many others regard as un-French because it is not exclusively French, although it could arise nowhere but in France. A new spirit is growing up here, whose manifestations the whole of Europe looks upon as its own, because the whole of Europe has contributed to its formation.

Consider all the foreign material which has passed into Paris and been worked up there ! Paris first discovered the East, in the shape of Chinese, Japanese and Persian

art; first discovered negro art and the South Seas. American music and foreign dancing came in via Paris; it was there that the tango started its career. The Russian ballet came and gave rise to a new range of colours, a new decorative art and a new mode, in which Munich and Vienna found an echo. Paris became the experimental laboratory of the new painting, where Italian Futurists and Spanish Cubists worked out their ideas. Literature was influenced by Dostoievski and Tolstoy, and the great Englishmen, Meredith, Hardy and Conrad, of whom the rest of Europe still remains ignorant, enlarged its horizon. Hither from every country came the seekers after something new, and here they gave it shape. Ask a Japanese painter, or a negro sculptor or a South American writer where he became what he is, and his answer will be "Paris". Paris is the great cauldron in which the new drink is being brewed from all these ingredients. All have worked here, and in the act of going about their own business, they have built up the new spirit that belongs to them all in common. But it is Paris that has been strong enough to absorb and transform them all, Paris that stamps them. From all over the world they come, find their form here, and return whence they came.

It will very soon become apparent that the new style, for which the world has been so frantically and so vainly searching, has already been born here. Soon there will be no such thing as a French or German or Italian style, but only a European style, formed in Paris; painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature will no longer be French, German or Italian, but European once more.

The pre-war period is finished. What had the buildings of Wilhelmian Berlin to say to a foreigner? Was there any sort of link between the arrangement of a Paris flat

and that of a Berlin flat? Everything was purely local. There was a Swedish school of painting which would have nothing to do with the Danish, a Russian music which was exotic to a Dutchman. There is a connection, generally neglected but none the less clear, between the arts and politics. Nationalism, the division of Europe into hostile camps, was a result of the failure of the Napoleonic idea; and the Empire style was the last common style of Europe. Today, in spite of all obstacles and doubts, we are on the threshold of a united Europe, and at this very minute a common European style, which is merely the expression of a common European spirit, is coming into existence.

I shall be asked to produce evidence for this assertion and I am prepared to do so: but first of all I want to reply to criticisms which I can foresee. Erroneous opinions are current everywhere, in every country and about every country, and the Press does its best everywhere to darken counsel. The war and its aftermath, aided by wrong-headed and unprincipled politicians, have erected a wall of hatred and misunderstanding between France and Germany especially. The Germans do not believe in the new France any more than the French believe in the possibility of a new Germany. These two nations, which are absolutely made to complete each other, whose qualities and defects mark them out as intended by nature to work together, which simply cannot live without each other either intellectually, economically or politically, hate and despise each other and search the world for allies against each other. It is the duty of everybody who knows the truth to work for a reconciliation between them, and the number of such workers is, fortunately, increasing daily. It is no easy task, and people often set about it in the wrong way. There is, of course, nothing to be hoped from those Germans who simply insist on

sticking to their prejudices; but equally little from those—by no means so uncommon—who uncritically admire everything foreign and hold it up as an example. It is absurd to call the French a reactionary, militaristic and decadent nation, but it is also absurd to make out that reaction, militarism, Chauvinism and narrow-minded hatred of foreigners are unknown among them. The differences between the two nations are by no means so tremendous; they are smaller than those between most other nations, and by far the best and most desirable thing that could happen would be that they should intermingle through emigration. Reaction is a reality in France; but I maintain—and the last elections¹ support me—that its influence is daily declining, that the nation is sick of it and no longer wants anything but peace and reconstruction. We know all the difficulties that stand in the way of reconciliation; but without underrating them, one may say that they are no more insuperable in a United Europe than were the quarrels of the little states which afterwards united to form big ones.

Reactionary France and the old spirit exist, but progressive France and the new spirit exist too. France has her unemployed generals, fire-eating clergy and narrow-minded small bourgeois like every one else, her people who say that because war and hatred always have existed they always will exist; but their influence is on the decline: France is quite free of any "victory-complex". And at the other end of the scale, the extreme Left has comparatively few supporters. The French nation is thoroughly sound; it is the least hysterical, the least given to extremes, in present-day Europe. That is what enables it to play such an important part in Europe's destiny. It is prepared to support any movement that promises it peace and security, and, I dare assert,

Written in 1925-26.

none that spells new unrest. Though it also has great difficulties to contend with, it is, in comparison with Germany and Central Europe, in such a healthy state that it has both the leisure, the peace of mind and the inclination to create. That is my first reason for thinking that it is France's vocation to re-build Europe. My second is based on an invariable trait in the French character. From time immemorial France has had a respect for the opinion of its intellectuals such as no other nation has shown, and it still has it; even today the influence of the intellectuals is, in the end, paramount. It is still the country where a Voltaire, a Rousseau, a Zola could make history, and where Rolland, Duhamel and Barbusse are making it today. That is why the fact that the new art and literature of France reveal a new spirit is of such infinite importance; for in this country, what the leading intellectuals demand today is carried out tomorrow.

It is the misfortune of Germany that intellect, though respected, is most carefully and anxiously excluded from all political influence or activity. It is the land of specialists, in which politics, like everything else, are left to the "experts". But politics, like so many other things, and even more than they, are a question of common sense: there are plenty of subordinate officials to provide the expert information. At the present moment¹ the French Prime Minister's name is Painlevé—a colleague and friend of Einstein's.

Because the German intellectuals have no influence and know it, they do not take themselves seriously, and the result is that a younger generation is growing up in Germany that merely shrugs its shoulders at their preachments.

I have given my reasons for looking to France for

¹ Written in 1925-26.

the new spirit and its workings; I shall now attempt to show that it is already there and to trace its manifestations in the various departments of intellectual life. In order to demonstrate the existence of a new spirit I shall examine the fine and applied arts and literature. If I draw my examples from them and them alone, that is not, as might be supposed, due to any over-estimation of their importance; there are several good reasons for it. In the first place, this book is concerned with the things of the mind, not material things, although I am perfectly aware of the obvious connection between them. What interests me here is not facts, such as the growth of industry, the disappearance of the rentier class or the development of political parties, but intellectual phenomena alone; and among them I consider art (in the widest sense of the word) the most important for our purposes. I say nothing of science, philosophy or psychology. These are in their very nature super-national, and co-operation may be taken for granted in their case without any special discussion. But quite apart from that, I can as yet see no traces in them of what I call the new spirit. Undoubtedly, work of a revolutionary character has been done in these spheres during the past twenty years, and, moreover, everything hangs together; there is an internal connection between the metaphysics of Bergson, Freud's doctrine of the unconscious and Einstein's theories. But what they have in common is their subversive character. They have destroyed long-cherished prejudices which passed for truth; they, and all the other new scientific facts and theories—radiology, transmutation of elements etc., have undermined the whole rationalist and materialist system. In the domain of science nothing stands fast today: yesterday's truth no longer passes current, today's has not yet been formulated. When that happens, a new education will arise, with new text-

books, and a new outlook on life will follow. But that time has not yet arrived.

But it has arrived in art, which is why I have gone to art for my examples. I should like here to reproduce a parable of Jean Cocteau's, which expresses my ideas. "A round bottle lies on a table and, imprisoned in it, insects live and swarm. After a time an insect discovers that its universe is flat; a little later another one discovers that it is a cube; then another that it is triangular, then that they are free but bounded by a vault. And so on. A poet among them, wanting a rhyme for *onde*, writes :

Moi, pauvre prisonnier d'une bouteille ronde.

It has discovered everything, but nobody will listen."

It is because art foreshadows reality that it is of such decisive importance for the future. Art makes known today what is going to materialise tomorrow. It is not in virtue of any tremendous or influential part which it plays in the modern European's life—unfortunately it does nothing of the kind—but because it acts as a barometer which forecasts the coming weather, that the development of Europe is ultimately determined by what goes on and comes to the surface in art.

The new spirit is revealing itself in the most various departments of art. Everything significant that is being produced today has a certain common quality, something that has not existed for a long time—a new style, corresponding to a new outlook on life. Pre-war taste was Baroque and romantic (one has to use these rather vague terms, in default of more precise ones). The Kaiser Wilhelm memorial in Berlin and the Pont Alexandre in Paris are characteristic buildings of the turn of the century, a period which is equally typified by plays like *Cyrano*, the towering coiffures of the women, the

Wagner-cult or an exotic novel of Pierre Loti's. This "Baroque" went through many phases, but it never was anything but pompous, verbose, false and hollow at the core, a paste-board grand style. It called itself *Jugendstil* for a year or two, without altering its character; after that it took to the clumsily gigantic, which it thought "monumental" (e.g. the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* at Leipzig) and went in for factories that looked like fortresses and railway stations that vied with the Pyramids. It invented huge hats and naturalism on the colossal scale, and continued its course in painting as far as the sham ecstasy of the pseudo-Grecos. It was pretentious, inflated and dishonest in every conceivable way, an incarnate lie, which found its apotheosis in the world war—not in the grim, drab reality of the trenches but in the false romanticism of the journalists and many of the nation's leaders.¹ This baroque tissue of lies, in its wildest excesses, still lives on, alas, in the minds of a deplorably large number of people. It is the expression of the spirit of yesterday, of the clap-trap that has destroyed a continent.

By taking the opposite extreme one can see what constitutes the new spirit; for that has grown up out of a revolt against nauseating shams, out of a sense that things cannot go on in the old way, that the only possibility is to make a clean sweep of everything and start again. The intellectual of today has an almost morbid horror of every sort of insincerity; he will put up with no fine phrases, no ornamentation of any sort, no sentimentality. If it is true, as André Gide says, that classical art is the art which expresses most with the least means at its disposal, an art full of modesty and reserve, then the new art, the new spirit, is classical. It has nothing to do with

¹ Movements that are really successive are often muddled up together in time. Thus "Baroque" is still running riot in the post-war epoch, while the "new spirit" began long before the war.

classicism, with the imitation of the antique; but it is essentially akin to the antique in its simplicity, honesty and modesty. The new spirit is simple, not out of poverty, but, as great art has always been, out of wealth, out of contempt for the cheap and the trivial. Its simplicity is a victory over complexity, its rationality full of hidden reserves of feeling. It is constructive and wants the structure, the skeleton, to be visible and not covered up. It has learned from machinery that the most efficient thing is also the most beautiful—a fact which was already known to the builders of the Parthenon. It does not wish to appear other than it is; at the same time it is more than it appears. It begins from the beginning, but it is not deliberately primitive, which is only a form of romanticism. The new classical spirit has absorbed romanticism and overcome it. It is deliberately unromantic; for it is nothing more or less than the new form which is being evolved to absorb the whole chaotic content of intellectual Europe, the hard-won discipline which must, and will, control chaos. This discipline is the lesson that we all have to learn, the new European form, into which everyone all over Europe can, and will, put a different content, the new language, but not yet the new literature. The genius who will use it may be born in France or in Germany, may be a painter, a poet, an architect, a philosopher or a statesman. Other countries may be as rich, or richer, in every sort of talent today than France, but only France can provide them with the opportunity of expressing themselves, because it is the only place where a European tradition still survives, and because, on the other hand, foreign influences have freed this tradition of its excessive rigidity.

In spite of the fact that, to a superficial view, intellectual changes of a far more radical character appear to have taken place in many other countries, there is in reality

none where the inner content of pre- and post-war art and literature (one must not cling slavishly to dates, of course) is so fundamentally different as in France. The new generation has practically nothing in common with its predecessors; in form and content, technique and ethics alike, something new has arisen. In the whole output of the modern school of novelists, there is hardly a single significant work with an erotic theme. Gone are the days of complicated psychology and drawing-room literature; painting now only deals with quite simple subjects, and in decoration the historic styles are finished. Both inwardly and outwardly a new Paris has grown up; but because it is the Paris of the age-old tradition, this new city seems to have been there all along and to fit in harmoniously with the rest.

It is the same new spirit that speaks everywhere—simplicity of form, absence of ornament, efficiency, but with a grace and gaiety about everything that only Paris could achieve. The danger of the new tendency is that it easily becomes clumsy, dour and too excessively prosaic; in Paris they have known instinctively how to avoid this.

It is a great pity that, owing to the unpropitious nature of the times, architecture has almost wholly dropped out of the circle of the arts; but what I have said is true of all the others, and of a good deal more besides that lies outside the traditional and rather arbitrarily defined limits of "art".

Present-day women's fashions, for instance, reveal the same spirit. To the despair of the dressmakers, there are practically no more changes of fashion now—bravely as the fashion-papers may strive to conceal the fact. Apart from the seldom-worn full evening dress, the whole thing has really been reduced to one dress and one hat. The æsthetic principles of the modern woman are the same as

those of a modern motor car, picture or wardrobe-trunk—a severely simple shade and a “downright” colour (*couleur franche*); short hair to show the shape of the head and hats that fit it closely; a dress that shows every movement of the body—fashion permits no more cheating now, unfortunately for many people; and here and there an original touch, like a *bon mot* in a conversation. There is, perhaps, nothing that throws more light on the mentality of an epoch than women’s fashions, and the present fashion is, I think, the most “honest” there has ever been. The women who wear these simple clothes no longer set out to be complicated, enigmatic or dramatic either. All that is over, pre-war, like elaborate vice and decadence. They make their faces up brown—why? Because health is the fashion and they mean to have healthy complexions by hook or by crook. They no longer sway like nautch-girls as they walk, but have a perfectly simple and natural gait. It is the fashion to talk in short simple sentences. All this sort of thing, which seems superficial to superficial people because it is fashion, invariably expresses the ideals of an epoch. Such is the new ideal of the new age.

The new woman has no desire to make infinitely complex problems out of simple matters of love or marriage; hence the disappearance of the plays and novels of adultery. This particular Parisian export no longer exists, or if it does, only in the form of short and witty satires. The shop where she buys her things neither tries to imitate a drawing-room in Versailles, nor does it have stuffs descending in voluptuous cascades and magical lighting-effects in its windows. That hocus-pocus is finished too. Perhaps nothing is more typical of the new spirit than the new Parisian shop architecture (here, as in Germany, architecture has had to take refuge on the ground floor!), which deserves a chapter to itself, but unfortunately

cannot have it. One sees these charming shop-fronts everywhere, simply constructed, well proportioned and carried out in first-rate materials, with windows of a size suited to the goods shown in them (the cathedral type is a thing of the past) and goods so displayed that one can see them. The new living-room has few superfluous objects, but what there is has good lines and good colour and makes no attempt to conceal its function.

Everything hangs together. These women (and the men belonging to them) love the circus and the music-hall; for there one sees people who can *do* something and make no pretences. The theatre, in the old sense, bores them, but clowns, acrobats, trick-riders and conjurors are honest. That explains why there are so many excellent music-halls springing up and flourishing everywhere; also why the air here is alive with efforts, akin to those of the Russians, to evolve a new art of the theatre, embodying the lessons of the ballet, the circus and the music-hall. They like dancing (a simple pleasure), and take a passionate interest in good dancers, as they do in sport. The genuine article triumphs everywhere, while the would-be imitation drops out. The pictures people like are honest attempts to construct something, as nature does, not attempts to imitate nature's work: they are constructive. The books that are read reflect life as it is today; their authors know all about Freud and Einstein, but they are not academic exercises: they are books with a purpose and an intention behind them—no more art for art's sake—and make no attempt to conceal the fact. The music of today is clear and simple; hence people like both jazz and Stravinski and the modern French and, with and above them all, Bach, which is perfectly consistent.

The old forms of social life have ceased to amuse and are disappearing, the classes are getting mixed, and out of it all something new, extremely youthful, extremely

healthy and quite undeliberately revolutionary is springing up. Perfectly naturally and unaffectedly, a new style, a new spirit is emerging in life and society, art and literature, dress and speech. The new European formula is being worked out.

CHAPTER XVII

FINE AND APPLIED ART

THERE is one sphere in which the new spirit is not a mere promise for the future, or even just venturing on its first timid steps, but has already reached full maturity : I refer to painting. This is also the sphere in which the leadership has fallen to France. The new painting is a French creation. There must be something in the nature of our times to account for the fact that a new intellectual current should twice have revealed itself first in painting. Impressionism also began in painting and only subsequently conquered other worlds. We are so accustomed to regarding architecture as the basic fine art that we expect to find a new style first in it. On the other hand, we do not normally view poetry and philosophy in relation to the fine arts at all. Yet all of them are but manifestations of one and the same spirit of the age; and when that spirit has changed, the change is bound to find expression all along the line.

The buildings and parks of Versailles belong to the tragedies of Racine and the dress of the *Roi-Soleil*, Mozart's music to Watteau's pictures, Offenbach's *cancan* to Eugénie's crinoline. This obvious connection is usually overlooked in contemporary works, and for this reason, that it takes decades for the new spirit to penetrate every department of intellectual life. It is only then—by which time it has passed into history—that people realise that

there was a single style, a single formula, common to them all.

I have already said that I do not know why the revolution first revealed itself in painting; perhaps it was because painting was the most characteristic mode of expression of the period—one must not forget that the arts never all reach their high-water mark together. Be that as it may, long before Impressionism, the great dissolvent, had established itself, its successor was already there.

The new painting starts with Cézanne and is based entirely on him. It is the painting of reconstruction, of the new vision. The world begins again from the beginning and Cézanne is a primitive, but a primitive who has absolved the whole of decaying civilisation, digested it and overcome it. The reconstruction of Europe began in the painting of Cézanne long before its destruction had become a material fact. Here is the new spirit, which is classical because it is constructive, master of its feelings, simple, free from clap-trap and ornamentation. It rests on nothing that has gone before; it has nothing to do with Naturalism or Impressionism, still less with Classicism or Romanticism. It is genuinely the harbinger of a new age and a new outlook.

Cézanne looked at the world as if no painter before him had ever looked at it, and slowly, painfully, and with infinite labour hammered out the vehicle for expressing his vision of it, the new language for the new subject-matter. Cézanne creates as Nature herself creates, by building up; quite simple things first—pots and fruits and elementary geometrical shapes; then houses, landscapes, human beings. It is all reduced to its simplest terms, without any sort of sophistication, all perfectly honest—a new truth. A new sense of space comes into being with Cézanne: he did not lose hold of the discovery of the

Impressionists, the unity and equal value of all life, but this unity is no longer achieved by making everything melt away and disintegrate : it is a new universality, which respects the rights of each individual. This new art is a strong, healthy growth, which accepts life in an affirmative spirit. These little pictures which portray such simple objects are genuinely monumental. Their message is clearness, simplicity, honesty; they meet the demand for the plain truth, without frills, which we have seen to be the essential feature of the new spirit.

Cézanne's work has the quality of inevitableness and its triumph was equally inevitable. Since his day it is no longer possible to see the world otherwise than as he saw it, because he was the first person who saw our present world. All modern painting is based on him, and through him there is at last a European art again.

Impressionism also had a world-wide success, but it was merely imitated. A vision that was really only possible in France (that melting of the form in light, which is the main characteristic of the Impressionists, is only to be observed in the French, and particularly the Parisian, landscape) was transported to places to which it was inappropriate. "His pictures have a French accent," said an Englishman of one of his compatriots who painted the English countryside in the Impressionist manner. Painting had this French accent everywhere, but it produced nothing in this way but imitations of foreign models.

Cézanne, on the other hand, invented the new pictorial language of Europe. His truth is as true in Stockholm or Bucharest or Madrid or Munich as it is in Paris; for it is universal, the common possession of all Europe, the expression of a new Europe. Frenchmen and foreigners alike have built on his foundations, and their pictures speak a European language. The Cubists are his suc-

cessors; the problem with which they are concerned is that of structure, which was raised once more by him.

Bracque and Picasso derive from Cézanne; so do Derain and Neo-classicism, which is only the continuation of another side of his work. All the Scandinavians, Germans or Australians who are trying to express their feelings about the world in terms of paint, whether in Paris or in their own homes, are children of Cézanne, brothers and sisters. He contains within him the seeds of the most contradictory tendencies—abstract painting, Expressionism, and all the other blind alleys out of which there is no way except a return to the ruthless honesty of Cézanne.

There is no longer any such thing as a national school of modern painting; there is only a European school, or rather, a school of the white race. In this sphere united Europe is an accomplished fact, the new spirit has reached the stage of fulfilment, and if one were asked to define it, impalpable though it is, one could not do better than point to Cézanne. There is the synthesis of rationalism and emotion, the clearness that is born of profundity, the absence of ornament which is concealed wealth, the honesty which, so far from being prosaic, is the distilled essence of poetry; there is the new truth.

Were we anything approaching so far advanced in all departments as we are in painting, the new spiritual Europe would be an accomplished fact and would long ago have found its material expression.

Revolutions always begin in the heads of a few creative geniuses and then materialise themselves later. The French Revolution began in the brain of Voltaire, the Russian with Tolstoy; Ibsen and Strindberg destroyed the social order of the North. Out of a thousand subterranean currents, social, economic and political, by which the spiritual life of nations is affected, the word of

redemption is born in a mysterious way in the minds of certain great individuals. Inventions, discoveries, economic changes may be the immediate occasion of the revolution, but only when a great genius has found the magic word can the new world be born, without which everything is chaos. He may be a poet or a thinker or an inventor or a philosopher, but whatever he is, he is invariably creative. And it is my belief that the new Europe was first born in the pictures of a French painter.

Before the war there were attempts at a new architecture to be seen everywhere; the war and the impoverishment of Europe have interrupted its growth, but one can see the direction in which it is going to proceed. The architecture of the future exhibits the same reaction against clap-trap and emptiness that we have come to recognise as the hall-mark of the new spirit. It is the child of engineering and has not yet got over its parentage. It reveals the beauty of efficiency, which always arises, and is bound to arise, when means and ends correspond perfectly and expenditure is completely commensurate with results, the beauty of the perfectly contrived machine. An express engine, a racing motor-car, a big liner, all have this beauty. Disgust with the sham-palatial style of architecture has led people to set this up as the only possible modern beauty, and an æsthetic cult of the machine has grown up, which seems to me quite as romantic and sentimental as the cult of ruins.

It proceeds from a confusion between two different notions. The technical perfection I have described is the indispensable condition of all æsthetic pleasure, but it is not actual beauty and it is not enough to make a thing a work of art. It lacks the emotional basis, the expression of human feeling, be it sorrow, joy or longing—in a word, it lacks just what the machine lacks and the work

of art, like all the works of nature (of which it is after all one), possesses, namely, life.

The new architecture grew out of engineering and its works have been dedicated primarily to utilitarian ends; it has produced good factories and railway stations and office-buildings and stores: beyond that it has hardly progressed as yet. Houses, mostly cheap ones, have been built, but the problem of the block of flats, which is the most important one for the European city, has hardly been attacked so far, and there has been an entire absence of big architectural enterprises which could show whether we possess a new architecture or not.

The countries where architecture had advanced furthest were undoubtedly Germany and Austria. France, which had been spared the worst excesses of the previous era of bad taste, also gave little evidence of the reaction against it. There can be no doubt that in this sphere France, instead of influencing Central Europe, as in painting, is destined to follow its lead; indeed, it is clear from numerous buildings in the great industrial exhibition, that it has already gone a long way to doing so. I believe it will be the task of France to put life, lightness and humanity into what is at present over-heavy, too exclusively utilitarian and barrack-like, and I see a beginning of this process in the charming architecture of the new Paris shops to which I have already referred. No one disputes the need for a revival in French architecture and international co-operation is in this field a certainty. Out of it will arise the new European style, which we do not yet possess but of which we have an inkling. It will present the same aspect as the new spirit presents everywhere; that is to say, it will be logical, simple, efficient and honest. And whatever France adopts, she will add to it these qualities of proportion, harmony and gaiety which are of the essence of her being. I am confident that

in twenty years, say, there will be one style of architecture compulsory for the whole of Europe and accepted by all countries as their own, just as there is in painting. A house, a railway station, a hotel or a villa will bear the same stamp everywhere, because the same modern spirit will have established itself everywhere. There is no reason to fear any dreary monotony from this. People will build in the modern style everywhere exactly as they built in the Gothic style in the fourteenth century. In spite of the latter fact, the cathedral at Lübeck could not possibly be mistaken for Notre Dame or the minster at Ulm. The modern spirit will not, must not, prevent landscape, climate and tradition from continuing to influence architecture; but it will prevent the erection of further lies in stone.

It is an illogical fact, but a fact none the less, that the development of the "applied arts", the industrial arts, which, after all, is entirely dependent on architecture, began earlier and has progressed further than that of architecture itself. On the other hand, this lack of a solid basis has made itself felt only too clearly. The notion of a revival of the industrial arts originally started in England, but lost itself there in attempts to revive the mediæval handicrafts. The birthplace of the new industrial art is Central Europe : it grew up between Munich and Vienna, whence it branched out as far as Russia on one side and France on the other. In its early stages it was often in execrable taste, grotesque and unpractical; but it is a far cry from the *Jugendstil* to the achievements of today. It started, as it were, from scratch; everything was to be reformed : furniture, crockery, glass, silver, the ash-trays and the light-fittings, the flower-vases and the bath. But whereas so far the building, the room, had always existed first, all the accessories subsequently adapting and subordinating themselves to it, here they started

by making all the details, which were then housed, as a rule, in incredibly hideous flats to which they bore no sort of relation. Gradually, however, shapes were simplified, and here too a new style, honest and practical, has established itself. Shapes are simple, close to the elementary geometrical forms; the beauty lies in the quality of the materials used and the colour. Here too it is possible to speak of a European style. If it has met with most obstacles in France, that is because France was richer than any other country in admirable antiques, the consequence being that a very high standard was required of new things.

It is only since the war that the modern taste has got a firm footing there : for a long time it was regarded as too outlandish, as " Russian " or " Munich ", which indeed it was; the imported material had first to pass through the French mill before it could be accepted. Today French applied art is scarcely distinguishable from German, especially Viennese. The same spirit manifests itself everywhere. The things (I refer to the best of their kind) are simple, and have structure with right proportions and good lines. The influence of machinery on them is unmistakable, and people have begun to learn from machinery in the right way—not by imitating the look of machines, but by applying the lessons of efficiency and economy of means.

The trouble is, as I have said, that the basis is lacking. The interior decorator lacks the room on which he can set to work, the new spirit is still waiting for the new house. At this point the problem links up with the economic and social upheavals which are at present in progress. Material and immaterial things depend on each other. The new art, in which the new spirit is mirrored, is no longer intended for a comparatively small class of prosperous citizens; it is addressed, in its honest and

efficient simplicity, to the masses. Architecture must get beyond the factory and the office-block and tackle the problem of the dwelling-house. It seems to me quite certain that town-planning has got to be, and will be, completely revolutionised. The days of our present vast cities, in which people both work and amuse themselves and live, are, I believe, numbered. In the biggest, such as London and New York, the traffic problem in itself has already become insoluble. People are beginning (Ford is, characteristically, interested in the problem) to give serious consideration to the idea of building separate small towns, either grouped round factories or purely residential, at some distance from the main city; and isolated experiments in this direction have already been made. Modern means of transport, which are still capable of vast development—aerial transport, for instance—make this possible. It will then be possible to build little detached houses or hygienic blocks of flats for the masses. What the villa and the big hotel do for the rich will then be accessible to everybody. When that great age of building begins, the new architecture will get the big chance that it lacks now, and the applied arts their proper basis.

People long for hygienic conditions, for air and light and labour-saving construction and equipment. Our whole manner of living will become different. The obsolete division into living-rooms, dining-room etc., will disappear, along with other relics of a dying social order. Actually in the new houses of the last twenty years the rooms have got more and more like overcrowded boxes, ludicrous travesties in miniature of the aristocratic mansion. The social life for which these drawing-rooms once served has disappeared, because the bourgeoisie who lived in these houses has, with very few exceptions, lost its money all over Europe. The many-storied block of flats, as we know it, will also disappear. In my opinion,

the future belongs to the cheaply constructed house and the hotel type of dwelling. Both will confront the architect with new problems, with which the applied arts are inseparably connected. Nearly all the furniture which surrounds us is obsolete and unnecessary. Wash-basins, cupboards, chests of drawers, sideboards should all be built in. Only the seating accommodation and the tables (and not even all of these) need to remain movable. Rooms will be light and as large as possible; they will contain very little furniture, and that of a sort which is easy to keep clean. Where there is money for buying works of art, they will show up much better in such rooms. I believe that people will learn a lot from the æsthetic principles of the Japanese house, with its simplicity which combines cheapness and good taste, and its very few but varying works of art.

These are dreams of the future. But the fate of the applied arts, which are doomed to be homeless wanderers until then, and of the fine arts too, depends on the coming of such buildings. They, in their turn, all depend on the new social order. It is, in my opinion, a waste of time to dispute whether economic conditions are primary and intellectual movements merely their expression, or whether the new demands only become alive and articulate through the intellectuals. It is a single process in which both things go on at the same time and in dependence on each other, as we can see in our own day. New means of transport, technical revolutions, the new arts and the new society are all springing up together. The only difference is in the rate at which the process is happening: one nation is further advanced in the sphere of social reform or revolution, another in modern town-planning, a third in the new art or literature. But, without knowing or wishing it, they are all working for one great end. The new picture, the new book, the new furniture, the new

social order are only different aspects of the new spirit. Its opponents are instinctively aware of this, and we shall find that the reactionaries in politics and social life are also the enemies of the coming thing in art and thought.

Women's dress is bound up more closely than ever with the decorative arts. It has the advantage of mobility over them; the mode need not wait for the new house, although it will only achieve its full effect there. Today it is one of the most typical expressions of the new age, and in addition to that—which is particularly relevant to us here—it throws a revealing light on the position of France. Fashions still come from Paris as in the past, neither politics nor the impoverishment of the country have made any difference to that; but the Parisian mode has absorbed an infinite number of foreign influences. Up to about 1910 it was purely French and lived, like French architecture and decorative art, by a perpetual series of new modifications of the eighteenth-century tradition. The first great foreign influence was that of the Russian Ballet, which introduced oriental forms and colours, and its first high priest was Poiret. Since then every exotic influence has found its echo in the mode. After the war, however, came the gradual rise of the new fashion of simplicity, which was in many respects the death of Fashion, in the old sense of perpetual change. The straight line was introduced and with it short hair and little, untrimmed hats—and a lot more that is quite wrongly classed as mannish, whereas it merely represents the triumph of honesty in feminine fashions too. A sort of uniform came in for all countries, all classes of society, all hours of the day, and swept the board everywhere with astonishing rapidity. This has, however, only served to accentuate the fact that the new ideal, whose one aim is simplicity, is by no means so easy to carry out as it looks. And no one is so successful at it as the Parisian dress-

makers and their Parisian customers. A feeling for line and harmony is, through long tradition, as innate in the French as it was in the ancient Greeks, or the Japanese before they came into contact with European influences. The French are the great shapers and moderators of Europe. They are not more creative than other nations, and there are examples of a mightier and more profound spirit than the French, but they have a greater gift for design; and this quality of theirs is one that the rest of the world cannot do without.

The art of the theatre is the natural bridge between the fine arts and literature. All modern attempts to reform the theatre have this much in common, that they approach it from the spectacular and not from the literary standpoint. By the early years of the century the stage had become a pulpit, in which Ibsen, Strindberg, Tolstoy and Shaw propounded and discussed social, ethical or moral problems. The theatre addressed itself to the intellect. These preachers produced the most far-reaching effects, but in proportion as their doctrines found an echo in life outside the theatre and their spirit materialised itself, the theatre began to lose in significance. Today the dramatic stage is in a state of coma; other interests have thrust it into the background. The theatre addresses itself to the eye and the senses once more; it follows, and forms a part of, the evolution of the decorative arts and of architecture. At the threshold of this movement stand Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt and the Russian Ballet. Passing backwards and forwards as it did between England, Russia, Germany and France, it was international from the beginning. Gordon Craig comes first in point of time, but the influence of the Russian Ballet in the early stages was much greater, particularly in Paris, where its combination of arts produced a regular revolution. The orientalism of Bakst completely transformed the stage,

fashion and decorative art, and dealt a fatal blow to the tradition of the eighteenth century and the *patisserie* style into which Louis Seize had degenerated. Paris "debarbarised" and Europeanised the new style. That is one side of the influence of the Russian ballet, its pictorial side. The Russians were painters, as is Reinhardt; their productions were illuminated pictures. But they are of yesterday, not of today—which is, of course, no criticism but merely the statement of a fact.

The ballet-influence was much more significant in its second aspect. It restored the art of dancing to its old pre-eminence. Today dancing, pantomime, eurhythmics take precedence of everything else; they are the real pith and marrow of contemporary stage-craft. All these aspirations declared themselves simultaneously, but the forms they have taken are exceedingly various. In Moscow Tairov and Meyerhold are creating a new theatrical language of expressive bodily movements: their actors are dancers, acrobats and circus-artists. The fact that they still talk at all strikes one as a disturbing accessory, showing a defective sense of style. Mary Wigman and Laban are attacking the same problem from another angle in Germany. In France, the co-operation of artists of every nationality is at last producing a new art of the theatre, of which the former Russian and Swedish Ballets are the exponents. Painters like Picasso, Bracque, Dérain, Marie Laurencin, Nils de Dardel, are working together with musicians such as Satie, Auric, Manuel da Falla and, above all, Stravinski, and writers like Jean Cocteau, who is at the centre of every new musical or theatrical movement, to create a European art of the theatre. They are at present in the experimental stage, and perfection is still far ahead, as it is in most other departments. Everything they produce is new, and European. The return to simplicity, to the primitive and unvarnished, is in evidence

here too. And in the scenery and costumes, which play an important part in securing the total effect, the ideas of Gordon Craig are enjoying a belated triumph.

The days of the picturesque are over; in the theatre, as elsewhere, they have taken to constructing again. Naturalism and orientalism are equally out of favour; it is simple, expressive forms that are wanted. Stage architecture is governed by the same law as ordinary architecture, and has entirely renounced all make-believe—too much so, perhaps. It may be that, like Naturalism, it is thereby being brought back too close to life; but time alone will show; for this art is as yet only in its infancy.

It is influenced by the circus, the music-hall, the cinema and mechanics, and is searching for a synthesis. The same sort of thing may be observed in the revue theatres. A present-day revue includes everything—dancing, acrobatics, the art of the circus and the cabaret, all mixed up together. Something new will emerge from it all; but at present it is in a transitional stage, it is (from material causes also) a shapeless farrago of incongruous details, good, bad and indifferent thrown together higgledy-piggledy. Nevertheless, it is in the music-halls, not in the theatres, that one gets one's greatest and most serious æsthetic experiences today. The place is bursting with talent—dancers, diseuses, acrobats, clowns, actors; they are all immensely competent, and know their own jobs to perfection (that is the form in which the honesty which characterises the new spirit everywhere manifests itself here). What the public wants today is people who deliver the goods. They will put up with no sham; they are the same public which throngs to the great sporting events, and are accustomed to watching champions, which these dancers, acrobats, clowns and diseuses are in their own line. The present-day music-hall is a disorderly chaos of first-rate performances and rubbish; but it is very much

alive and in the synthesis of various arts which it and the ballet attempt lies the future of the European stage.

Modern music, which represents a return to structural simplicity via the loop-way of the exotic, seems to have the same starting-point. The jazz band belongs here, but so does Stravinski, and it is not mere coincidence that all the young French, Spanish and Russian musicians are so intimately associated with the ballet and the music-hall.

It would be unjust to make no mention here of the reformers of the spoken drama. Jacques Copeau has done magnificent work : he is above all things intellectual, a moralist and a puritan of the theatre; and his company is a real *ensemble*. There are also a number of not uninteresting playwrights (most of them working in conjunction with Copeau or his successor, Dullin), like Achard, Benjamin and Jules Romains, whose work reveals the same desire for simplification and sincerity that we have observed everywhere else. But there is no denying the fact that these efforts are meeting with relatively little success, and are not powerful enough to awaken the drama from its slumbers. Here, as everywhere, Pirandello is the king of the stage; it may be that he is destined to be the founder of a new drama, but my own opinion is that the universal lack of public interest in the theatre proceeds from deep-seated causes and will prove to be no transient phenomenon. The world has turned its back on the over-intellectualised spoken drama and in the theatre, as everywhere else, it is beginning right at the beginning with a new *commedia dell'arte*, from which a new drama may, perhaps, at some far distant date develop.

Here, too, the connection with the social problem is an obvious one. The drama always expresses the mental attitude of a certain social class. The drama of the *grand siècle* was courtly, that of the nineteenth century bourgeois, and the new drama presupposes a new society; it has to

address itself to the masses. Now the masses take the liveliest interest in the new art that is growing up in the music-halls; dancing and the circus attract them just as the cinema and sport do, because they find their own souls, their rhythm, their tempo reflected in all of them; but they do not find this in the drama. Grock or Mistinguette, Charlie Chaplin, the Fratellinis or the great dancers strike an answering chord in every class and in every country and are immediately intelligible. It is no mere accident that even the Paris stage today cannot boast a single actor or actress of whom that could be said. Sarah, Réjane, Coquelin, Guitry have left no successors. The day of the great actor seems to be over; here as elsewhere in Europe, the genius of the race is showing itself in other fields.

CHAPTER XVIII

LITERATURE TODAY

"IN the beginning was the word." The innumerable, half-conscious, undirected forces and tendencies which are ceaselessly at work making the old bring forth new, only become effective when the right man has given them shape, i.e. put them into words. Words turn the half-conscious into the conscious; the actual life of a movement begins with words, just as we reckon the life of a human being from the movement at which he emerged from darkness and first looked upon the light of day. The revolution which has long been maturing in the womb of political and economic causes, only becomes a fact when the right man has come along and given definite shape and expression to the obscure aspirations of the masses. I take the word "revolution" in its widest sense : every new movement is a revolution, and evolution consists of a continuous series of these revolutions. What we commonly call a revolution differs only quantitatively, not qualitatively from the regular march of events; because the jump is bigger, we see the law of change at work more clearly on such occasions. "Modern society will be destroyed by ink," is a saying of Napoleon, who also said : "In the end the intellect is always mightier than the sword." This is not the presumption of "intellectuals" who attribute this overwhelming importance to the intellect as their own particular department; it is a sober truth, which needs to be repeated again and again in an age which

regards material forces as the only really important ones. According to the doctrine of Marx, all history proceeds from economic causes (which is one side of the truth); but Marxism itself is surely an intellectual cause: Karl Marx hit upon the magic word, and lo! the movement was there. No matter whether it is the researches of Galileo, the writings of Voltaire, the *Contract Social* of Rousseau, the Marseillaise or the Sermon on the Mount, it is always the word, as the expression of an ideal of which the masses were till then unconscious, that sets the operative forces in motion. Therefore there is nothing more important for a nation's future, no better guide to the course of its development, than its literature.

The Europe of the war and the revolutions, of moral, social and political upheaval, found its expression thirty or forty years before these things actually happened, when it was still slumbering in bourgeois peace, in the writings, novels and plays of Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Dostoievski, Ibsen and Strindberg, to mention only the most important names.

The reigning figures in French literature were then Zola, Maupassant, Flaubert and Anatole France—it was the age of Naturalism, Socialism, scepticism and the doctrine of art for art's sake. Much in the literature of the present day derives from them, as they themselves derive from Voltaire and Rousseau, the fathers of modern French literature. It is the strain in French literature that comes from this tradition, the tradition of Voltaire and Rousseau, that is of European importance. But alongside of this there is always another literature, which is equally important to the French themselves, though it does not point beyond their frontiers—the tradition that rests on a national, conservative (which in French means both Catholic and anti-republican) basis. This particular literature produced an extremely rich harvest during the twenty

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years or so preceding the war, but, naturally, did not get itself so well known abroad. While the world still regarded Zola, France and Co. as the representatives of the (then) present generation, the period was really standing under the sign of reaction. Its leading spirit was Maurice Barrès, who, after a youth of somewhat decadent æstheticism, became the apostle of nationalism, of martial training for the young men, of the "national tradition". His influence on the young was enormous, which is explicable on the ground of his very great talent, quite apart from the trend of the age. With him should be bracketed Claudel, the Neo-catholic, and third (in influence and talent) Paul Bourget, the favourite writer of the conservative upper classes. Their present-day successors, who still wield a considerable influence, are Charles Maurras, Henri de Montherlant, Mauriac, and some others.

These men are, as I have said, representatives of a national, not a super-national tradition, and are therefore irrelevant to our theme. But we shall only understand what we may call the spirit of present-day French literature if we realise that it is reacting from the tendencies of the epoch I have just described.

Its chief spiritual ancestor is Rousseau, that is to say, the eighteenth century on its super-national, socialistic, ethical side. Its immediate precursors are Romain Rolland and André Gide, with whom an entirely new spirit entered into French literature and made it a European literature once more. "The significance of present-day French literature is above all things moral and political," writes Giraudoux, and he is right. That is why the great masters of the Naturalist epoch cannot be regarded as its ancestors. Much they already have—the demand for social justice in Zola, the super-national, pacifistic tendency in Anatole France—but these are acces-

sories, they are not the main thing in their work. Both for Zola and Anatole France the moment came when they had to descend into the political arena (Voltaire is the model here) in order to help justice to victory, but apart from all extraneous circumstances—and this only makes their conduct more admirable—their interests lay elsewhere.

Rolland and Gide, like Rousseau, write not to produce literature, but—by artistic means, not as preachers, of course—to make the world better. Both of them are European writers; hence their success is greater abroad than in France itself, where Rolland is rejected by many people as too “German”, Gide as too Protestant; but their influence on French literature has been all the greater for that. Whatever there is of pacifistic, socialistic, European (in the political sense) feeling in French literature today is unthinkable apart from Rolland’s influence; but the tendency of Gide and the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, which grew up under his influence—its publishers have become the main, even if not the only, rallying-point for these ideas—has also been towards Europeanism, in the sense of a super-national intellectual cosmopolitanism. Perhaps it is already necessary to distinguish two periods here. During the war and the years immediately following it, the influence and example of Rolland—who was then, as is well known, living in enforced exile as a “traitor”—was paramount. This period produced the war books, so splendid in their humanity, of Barbusse, Duhamel and their school. These writers are at the same time left-wing Socialists, and in this respect Jules Romains also belongs to them. In our own day, however, when everything changes so incredibly quickly, they have already been succeeded by another generation (successors in the intellectual sense, not in actual age), which I regard as the generation of today. Here at last I find once more

that "new spirit" which I have attempted to describe in connection with the fine and applied arts, the emergent spirit of present-day Europe. From this point of view it is not the degree of a writer's literary talent that interests me—thus, for instance, Marcel Proust, the greatest novelist of the last twenty years, finds no place here—but the intellectual content of his works. It is a great cause for rejoicing that France can today boast a regular galaxy of highly-gifted European writers. This generation is, before all things, consciously cosmopolitan, consciously European: it is the exact opposite of the "exotic" school of Loti, Farrère and co. One of its most talented representatives, Paul Morand, has put the case as follows, in an interview with Lefèvre: "Exoticism is the literary exploitation of remote material, lying beyond our frontiers, to the exclusion and detriment of what is to be found inside them. Our object is the exact reverse—to establish true and permanent relations, for ourselves and other partakers in the new age, between our country and the rest of the world". This striving after the supernatural is, in fact, only a part of that striving after truth and honesty which meets us wherever we look. That is what makes all the cosmopolitans reformers of style at the same time. They are reforming it, in the first place, by not bothering about it. They no longer write novels at all, in the old sense; there is no conventionally constructed story with development, climax and conclusion, no carefully polished dialogue. With them æsthetic considerations are entirely subordinated to purpose; but this very striving after brevity and "snappiness" is giving rise to a new style.

The new literature is a meeting-ground of many heterogeneous elements. Its protagonists have all, without exception, lived much and long abroad. Valéry Larbaud has a thorough knowledge of the whole of Europe, and is

especially familiar with England, Ireland and Spain, and their literatures. Paul Morand spent his early years in Russia and studied at Oxford. Giraudoux knows Germany thoroughly, Pierre MacOrlan is well acquainted with the North. Paris and the boulevards, even France, no longer mean everything to these men; they are only a part of the great mundane spectacle. Their mentality has absolutely nothing in common with that of the pre-war Frenchman, for whom the rest of Europe was inhabited by "barbarians", the globe by "exotics". The large amount of foreign literature that has just recently been translated into French, thus bringing about a widening of the horizon, is part of the same tendency. Here, as everywhere, the great Russians have left their mark; but the English influence is even more characteristic. Samuel Butler, the Utopist and satirist, Joseph Conrad, the great novelist of the South Seas, Stevenson, Meredith, Hardy have all become popular French writers, while of the Germans the most influential are the two scientists, Einstein and Freud. A European attitude of mind is thus growing up which influences Europe in its turn; for it is a fact that these young writers are tremendously read abroad. They exercise a strong influence on the mentality of all the new and still unstable countries, like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the Baltic states, and it is a fortunate thing that their influence is in the direction of international reconciliation.

This literature has nothing in common with the literary goods that France exported in pre-war days. Perhaps the most significant thing about it is the very small space it gives to sex. Where it occurs at all, it is either a minor detail or, as in Morand, for instance, a subject for irony. Gone are all the tales of love and adultery and the descriptions of more or less unusual erotic phenomena. These people have all got something to say.

This is not a history of modern French literature; I am

merely treating it as one manifestation of what is happening in the intellectual world today, and am therefore unable to expatiate on everything that deserves it; I can only refer in a few words to one or two books which seem to me specially characteristic. One of these is *Barnabooth*, by Valéry Larbaud, the diary of a millionaire who tries to find himself all over Europe, which has been compared with *Werther*. Another is Jean Giraudoux's *Siegfried et le limousin*, the most fair-minded book on the German and French mentalities that I know, a brilliant, witty and at the same time profoundly serious treatise in novel form on their reciprocal relations. Pierre MacOrlan and his *Vénus Internationale*, a searching analysis, in fantastic form, of the spirit of Moscow, are essentially of today; so is Paul Morand in his grotesquely distorted accounts of his experiences all over the world (*Fermé la Nuit*, *L'Europe galante* etc.), profound experiences, even though he sees them with the eye of the caricaturist. Another characteristic production, in my opinion, is Lamande's first novel, *Ton pays sera le mien*, the story of a Franco-German marriage.

What all the above-mentioned works, and many more that I have not mentioned, have in common is their fearlessness (these writers are in the best sense no respecters of persons), honesty, open-mindedness and what I should call "emotional chastity". They are not masterpieces, but essays in demolition. The ground is being cleared from which the new building is to rise, the language being forged in which the great writer will express himself. Other nations whose experiences have been still more tragic, more catastrophic, more profound than those of the French will perhaps also produce works of more profound content; but these Frenchmen are the first to address themselves to the European public of the post-war period, our period, and in so doing to create it. This

literature is a good example of how mutual give and take between nations produces something significant for all. All contribute to it, therefore it belongs to all; but France gives it its shape.

CHAPTER XIX

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

THE new spirit is a fact that no unprejudiced observer can deny. The reason why its existence is so frequently disputed is that most people never think of linking up the new manifestations observed in different spheres with each other, but accept them as isolated phenomena, without grasping the connection between them. They admit the existence of the new painting, say, or the new dancing, or the new "line", but it never enters their heads that all these things are related to each other and expressions of a single ideal; and still less that these matters of art or fashion or literature are intimately bound up with political and economic developments, that the future of the many depends on the present state of mind of the few. The very people who find no difficulty in believing that Goethe or Voltaire influenced their age, that we are still being affected by the art and philosophy of the ancients, of Christianity or of the Renaissance, are unable to see that the influence of mind on events is as much a reality today as it ever was in the past. They accuse one of over-estimating these intellectual symptoms and maintain that a nation's history is really determined by the actions of high finance and industry on the one hand and of the working classes on the other, that it is not in the least affected by non-material factors, but that all follow their

own interests to the exclusion of everything else. I consider that an extremely one-sided view. Of course, everybody acts according to what he believes to be his interests, but who has explained to him where his interests lie? From the material point of view, the interests of the working classes in different countries are, for the most part, opposed to each other, they are competitors; nevertheless they *see* their interest in international combination. For instance, when there is a strike in the same branch of industry in another country, instead of taking advantage of the freedom from competition so gained, they support the strikers. Why? Because they have a common ideal of the future, for which they care more than for their immediate material interests. They are out not for the biggest possible earnings at the moment, but for social justice. That is more than can be said for the great financiers and industrialists. Taken as a whole, the bourgeoisie of today has no real intellectual position at all, it does not believe in such things. It goes on just as blindly as the aristocracy did before the French Revolution. In those days it was the bourgeoisie that readily absorbed the new spirit which the aristocracy—with exceptions, which are also, happily, numerous in the bourgeoisie of today—derided. But blindness and scepticism have never yet, in the long run, prevented the new birth.

When the first, poverty-stricken apostles preached Christianity in imperial Rome, I have no doubt that every upper-class Roman thought it an incredibly utopian and silly notion that this “new spirit” might destroy the Empire and ancient civilisation. And later, when a few artists disinterred some classical statues, no princes of the Church would have admitted that this meant the end of mediæval Christian piety, that a world had received its death-blow and a new one had begun.

The position to-day is exactly the same. The fact that there is something new afoot in every intellectual sphere means nothing more or less than that a new heaven and a new earth are coming into being. It is a subject that extends far beyond the limits of this book, which deals with only one aspect of the question, namely, whether a new spirit exists in France today and, if so, what it means to Europe. Neither the new philosophy nor the new psychology of the unconscious, nor the new conception of the world involved in the theory of Relativity, all of which imply a complete intellectual revolution, comes into the subject¹; and political, economic and social phenomena lie equally outside it. When the new spirit has got far enough to show unmistakable signs of itself in these fields, that will mean that the ideal has materialised itself, and the question whether it exists will then have become superfluous. When the Crusades happened, it was no longer necessary to prove that Europe possessed a common Christian ideal; and when the armies of the Revolution marched out, it was then too late to discourse upon the influence of Rousseau's ideas.

The fact that symptoms and even actual achievements of a new spirit are forthcoming and that this spirit is super-national and European in character, is especially important, because on that depends whether there is ever going to be a Europe again at all : at present there is none. Let it not be said that these indications are too unimportant to draw conclusions from; their significance lies in their opposition to the immediate past. A cloud no bigger than a man's hand is the precursor of a mighty storm, a modest ray of sunshine heralds the end of the Flood.

The question whether Europe will survive pre-supposes

¹ Fortunately, the super-national character of science and technology are such an obvious fact that they do not need to be stressed.

that such a thing exists. But Europe is simply and solely an intellectual and cultural unity. Geographically it is a peninsula, with no frontier dividing it from Asia, politically and economically it is mosaic of scattered units which form no single whole. *Europe has only existed at such times as a common European spirit existed.*

There was a Roman Europe, a Carolingian Europe (which came nearest to the ideal), a Europe of the Crusades; there was a humanistic, intellectual European commonwealth, and a Europe of court civilisation in the eighteenth century, both still implying at least some degree of coherence; there was very nearly a Napoleonic Europe; since his fall there has been none.

Its place was taken in the nineteenth century by something entirely new. Inside Europe there were the national states, each looking upon itself as an independent entity, outside it the scramble for colonies : nationalism at home, imperialism abroad. A certain sense of solidarity grew up between members of the white race, but only as against other races. As against a Chinaman, an Arab, or a negro, Englishmen, Germans and Frenchmen felt they were brothers, but inside Europe this feeling had entirely disappeared. America was still comparatively insignificant, the other continents were either European colonies or, in so far as they were independent, utterly inferior in the view of the Whites. The world was dominated by the Great Powers of Europe, who quarrelled or made alliances with one another, and that was the whole extent of the political horizon. Those days have gone for ever, but only very few people seem to be capable of realising the fact in good time. Today we have world Powers in the shape of Great Britain and the United States; a Russian world Power in the making; and a Japan which

is striving, against the will of the Anglo-Saxons, to become the Mongolian world Power.¹ Compared with these Powers all the individual European states are dwarfs—impoverished, absolutely dependent on America financially, and politically all but powerless. That is the new position and only a united Europe can still count for something in the affairs of the world.

This united Europe cannot be created by force—the whole of European history teaches that. Europe can only become a whole once more when it feels itself as a whole. A European consciousness is a pre-requisite of European unity, and only the birth of a European spirit can bring a politically and economically united Europe out of the chaos of today. A family has common interests to which single members of it often subordinate their own, but that implies a consciousness of belonging to a family, of forming a unit.

Nationalism has no future today; the several European states are no longer capable of carrying on in their present isolation. There are several possible lines of development. One possibility is the spread of Bolshevism all over Europe; that would mean the end of Europe and its incorporation in the Russian Empire. Personally, I believe that the European spirit is radically opposed to Bolshevism. Its most powerful adversary is the classical spirit and all that goes with it, which is most flourishing in the Latin and the Catholic countries.² Another, and growing, danger (brought on by imperialism) is the re-awakening of Islam, which is turning against the Whites,

¹ This position is clearly analysed for the first time in Coudenhove's *Pan-Europa*.

² On the other hand I think it very possible that a new European spirit may once more influence Russia. People are too ready to forget today that it was the Russians who had come under European influence that carried the new gospel to Russia, and to regard them as pioneers and leaders.

and fear of which, incidentally, has already once in the past created a united Europe. The danger is not as remote as it seems. Further in the background still is the riddle of the yellow races, and they, too, are fermenting ominously. Finally, there are signs, particularly disquieting to the United States, of the beginning of a Black imperialism. The war of the Whites among themselves, with the aid of coloured troops, has destroyed their prestige in the latter's eyes for ever. The unquestioned supremacy of the White man is a thing of the past; only united action can secure his future; and the first step to that is European unity.

In a previous book of mine, *Asien als Erzieher*,¹ I foreshadowed a European-Asiatic synthesis and described it as a desirable thing. It may therefore seem, at first sight, paradoxical on my part to set up the re-awakening of a European spirit as the goal of our endeavours here. The inconsistency is, however, only apparent. The European spirit with which I was concerned in that book was the spirit which I there characterised as "merely European", the spirit of materialism, utilitarianism and purblind rationalism. The "Asiatic" spirit with which I contrasted it was the spirit of universalism, unity, emotional intuition. That this spirit is already at work here I have shown in a later work, *Die Abkehr vom Verstande*.² The "merely European" spirit is dead, and the "Asiatic" influence has reached as far as Western Europe. I have never represented the destruction of the European spirit as a desirable thing, but only an alliance between it and the East, for it is my opinion that the greatest epochs in European history have always been brought on by contact with the East, and that the one-sided

¹ Shortly to be published in this country under the title of *The Message of Asia*.

² i.e. "The Retreat from Reason".

development which began with the Renaissance has come to an end with the twentieth century, in the world war.

For a long time Europe overrated itself vastly, and thought itself the only civilised place in a world of savages; those were the days of the "merely European" spirit. Today it recognises its mistakes and can appreciate the spirit of the East at its proper value. In Central Europe particularly, opinion has swung round, and there are now large numbers of people who think that little of importance would perish with Europe, which is undue modesty following on swollen head. The world would lose something of infinite value, something that could never be replaced, if Europe, instead of combining with Asia to create something new, were simply to be swallowed by it. Present-day European civilisation, which is most certainly not a mirror of the European spirit for which we long but rather of the spiritual outlook of yesterday, is on the point of transforming itself and disappearing; it is, however, not a case for relapsing into primitive barbarism, but for transcending this civilisation. The Asia that can help Europe in this task is the Asia of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Bhudda, of Lao-tse and Confucius, not the Asia of today, which has almost forgotten its own wisdom and is imitating much of what is worst in Europe. A material conquest by present-day Asia or by a Russia that is growing steadily more Asiatic, would be a disaster to the human race. And, let me repeat once more, with a dismembered Europe it is quite on the cards. It would be a repetition of the Hunnish and Turkish wars, which could only lead to the destruction of a Europe torn asunder by internecine strife.

A united Europe is an absolute necessity for all the European nations, if they are to survive; and only the

birth of a European spirit can bring it about. But that can only happen if those elements in the European tradition which have proved their survival-value—and they are chiefly to be found in France in these days—unite with what material and spiritual upheavals have made of the rest of Europe. The latter, with Germany, the decisive factor, at its head, is hesitating today whether to join hands with Russia or the West. The Russian and the far-eastern spirit have had a powerful influence on Germany, and a salutary one. But now the time has, I am convinced, come when she must turn back to the West, if she wishes to remain European at all and not to become a Russo-Asiatic province. The age-long yearning of the Teutonic peoples for the South is merely an instinctive search for something essential that they lack. Germany needs the spirit of Latin antiquity to give form to the abundance of her own : and the Rome of today is Paris. France, on the other hand, only became France through the addition of the Teutonic to the Latin element. This once produced Gothic, and is now producing the European spirit, with the aid of a Slav contribution this time. The present position may be summed up thus:—The merely French spirit has vanished under the transforming effect of all the foreign influences I have described; in the meanwhile the German spirit has been changing too. They are very near to each other. Germany once more needs from France, or rather the Teutonic soul needs from the Latin, the gifts of measure, form, clarity and gaiety. The Latin soul still needs, what it has for some time already been drawing upon, the emotional power and the freshness of a younger race. The architect and his material must be brought together. Neither in France nor in Germany are people blind to the need for a widening of mental horizons, but in both countries the majority thinks it can get on without the ex-enemy's help. Germany greedily

swallows everything Russian; chaotic herself, she yields to the seductions of still greater chaos. France, meanwhile, has constructed an imaginary Europe for herself, which she seeks to influence and whose works she takes to her bosom, a Europe without a centre, a Latin and Slav Europe with the Teutonic left out.

But these are impossible Utopias. Both Germany and France, if they are to go on surviving, must learn to act super-nationally, to show a super-national spirit; each of them has need of Europe and there can be no Europe without the co-operation of both.

I shall not lack critics who will accuse me of over-estimating the importance of the French spirit to Europe. The subject of this book may, in itself, easily give rise to a misapprehension of that kind. Its business is not to establish which member of the European family of nations has contributed most to the common stock, but to throw light on the contribution of one of them; it asserts nobody's superiority or inferiority and makes no comparisons. If it comes to that, no one nation's achievements can be separated from those of the rest: without Rome and the Franks there would be no France. But that the French spirit is of first-class importance to Europe today is my conviction, which it is the object of this book to substantiate.

In the impoverished and forlorn European family, where brother's hand is raised against brother, there is only one member whose health is sound enough, and his affairs in sufficiently good order, for him to help the others, and that one is France. But the maintenance of that health and order depends on the others, especially Germany. Europe has a common destiny—no national dislikes can make any difference to that fact. The present state of

dismemberment cannot go on. Either Europe will unite, or all its component nations will severally go under, and with them Europe. No thinking man any longer believes in the possibility of strengthening one nation at the expense of the rest, even if he should think it desirable. The most convinced nationalist must work for European unity today. France is better off than the other nations, and therefore has the greatest interest in the common fate of all of them; it has the most to lose. The defeatism, and the slackness and indifference that go with it, which have infected large sections of the population of Central Europe, have left France untouched. France believes in a future for Europe because she believes in her own future; therefore she will put her shoulder to the wheel. There is no other solution, either for France or for Europe. France is the home of the European synthesis; she has had her exclusively national periods and her super-national ones. Her history has been one long give and take with her neighbours. She took from Rome and mediæval Germany, and gave Europe Gothic; she took the Italian Renaissance and English ideas, and out of them made the spirit of the eighteenth century and the Revolution. Give and take is the law that governs the relations between the European peoples. In comparison with that, wars, conquests and losses, political ups and downs are of secondary importance, mere family squabbles. Pre-war France was exclusively national, the France of today is getting ready to become super-national. She has exposed herself to endless foreign influences and digested them all. Since the war she has become a country of immigration on a scale quite unknown before: the number of foreigners resident in France is estimated at three millions, to which must be added another three million birds of passage—a fact of great significance. She has no choice but to try and bring about the fusion of these

foreign elements with her own people, and she is addressing herself to the task, for which she is well qualified by her past history. France is the giver of form, clarity, outline; she is, as André Gide has put it, the drawing-master of Europe.

In the twentieth century Paris has become, in an ever-increasing degree, the centre which the intellectuals of every country regard as their home. Its influence extends far beyond Europe. It has always fearlessly extended its hospitality to everything foreign, and succeeded, thanks to its firmly rooted tradition, in refining and re-shaping it. That is still the case today. Paris is the intellectual capital of both the Latin and the Slav races (excepting Russia), but its relations with the Teutonic kernel of Europe were interrupted by the war and have not been resumed. Franco-German hostility, if it persists, will inevitably lead to the downfall of both nations.

Neither present-day France nor present-day Germany is the nucleus round which Europe grew up : that was the empire of Charlemagne. The wound inflicted by the partition under Charlemagne's successors has remained open all these years; but it has got to be healed now, if Europe is to exist at all in the future. Improved means of communication and the growth of mutually dependent industries, absurd as it is, have only exacerbated the hatred between the two nations. All the countries of Europe have the same problems and are suffering from the same troubles; yet in spite of that they fight instead of helping one another. Whatever one may say, economic arguments are not sufficient to make Europe unite; if they were, it would long ago have become an economic unity, like the United States of America. This economic unity is an absolute necessity for Europe today (as the leaders of finance, industry and commerce have long recognised), but it will not be

realised until the ideals of the nations come into line with it. No economic, and still less any political, compulsion will unite Europe, in the absence of a common European spirit.

Today there is once more a spirit of Islam, independent of political frontiers, which ranges from India to Morocco and is definitely hostile to Europe. There is an Anglo-Saxon and a Russian spirit, but no European spirit. The future existence of Europe as Europe is threatened by danger from Asia, from Moscow and from America. Nor is the League of Nations an adequate protection; for the League, while it knows a British Empire, knows only of separate European states. I do not believe that anybody either in France or Germany, and still less in one of the smaller countries, can nourish the illusion that his country could stand up by itself against one of the world Powers of today. They have already lost some of their independence, and are destined to lose it altogether if they do not combine.

I know that many people want that to happen, that they pine for a gigantic Bolshevik Empire. From their point of view, a united Europe would be an obstacle to the realisation of their dreams; but for everyone else it is the only possible ideal, since a future on purely national lines has become impossible.

Only a united Europe can continue to exist on equal terms with the other world Powers; only a new European spirit, a European ideal, can translate this united Europe into fact; and only through the co-operation of all the European nations, but especially France and Germany, can this European spirit be born. They have, in fact, been co-operating and influencing each other for years; and everything must be done to encourage the process. For that purpose it is necessary to know what this European spirit is, and where and how it works. This book is

intended as a contribution to that subject. In it I have investigated the nature of the French genius, and maintained the thesis that its vocation is to give form and expression to the content of present-day intellectual Europe. It has this vocation because it is no longer merely French but super-national, in fact, European. The term "French genius" is necessary for the sake of clarity, but it has already ceased to correspond to the facts. A European spirit already exists. We stand on the threshold of a movement that is as little bounded by nationalities as Gothic or the Renaissance. Soon we shall only speak of the European genius, European form, ideas and ideals, and they, being the product of the joint efforts of all the nations and races of Europe, will belong to all in common. That this is the way the world is going is not only my hope but my conviction. Even the new Europe which will thus arise will have a hard struggle before it, but he that disbelieves in its possibility also disbelieves in the future of his own nation. The nationalist must also be a super-nationalist; only those who preach racial, instead of national, solidarity have no interest in the continued existence of Europe. I personally find it impossible to believe that the new things we see struggling to be born everywhere in Europe are destined to be swept away and annihilated before they have had so much as a chance. Nor, on the other hand, do I believe that they will come of themselves; they need the help of the intelligent in all countries.

The new spirit must re-awaken Europe, for Europe is indispensable to the whole human race, and can best serve it, not by allowing itself to be destroyed, but by being born again. The days of European dominion over the other continents are over; their dominion over Europe would be even less desirable by a long way. The unity of all is the ultimate aim, but unity in the large presupposes

unity in the small. We are not working for European unity in order to set it up in competition with some other; it is not the alternative to a more comprehensive synthesis of humanity, it is its first condition.



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